

The Experiences of New Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

by

Jessie Marie Loraas-Pletsch  
B.ED., University of Victoria, 2003

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**ABSTRACT**

Extant research describes the need for special education training in teacher training institutions. Research also states the importance of listening to the experiences of new teachers to inform best practice of teacher education training; however, there is a paucity of research examining the needs of new teachers to inform special education training for generalist preservice teachers. This phenomenologically informed study explores the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms to gain an understanding of the knowledge and experiences new teachers need. The participants include seven new teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms across BC. All data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to phenomenological procedures with the goal of understanding the essence of experience for these new teachers in their inclusive classrooms. Based on the new teachers' experiences, initial recommendations are provided for teacher training institutions and directions for further research are also discussed.

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Finally, I thank Will for his love and encouragement. I am a better person because of you. Here's to a future of love, laughter, and monsters.

### Dedication

I dedicate this to my family. To my parents, Doug and Susan, for giving me the world and encouraging me to make a difference. Your love, encouragement, and endless support has shown me the tremendous power of positive influence. You have taught me to work hard and to be true to myself. Thank you for everything. To Jen, I will always cherish our relationship and open-closet policy. To Nana, you truly are an Amazing Grace. I love you.

I also dedicate this to all of the amazing teachers who make a difference in the lives of children everyday.

Chapter 1

Introduction

*Overview*

The British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education (2001) states that the “goal of the BC school system is to support the . . . development of all students, including those with special needs” (Special Education, ¶ 1). This has not always been a goal of the BC education system, as children with special needs have not always been considered students. Over the past hundred years, there has been a progressive shift to individualized education in the least restrictive environment for all students (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). This shift has led to a school system that has adopted the principles of inclusion (BC Ministry of Education, 2001).

Before the late 19th century, all children with special needs were excluded from education in BC and all across Canada (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Pudlas, 2001). The first educational opportunity for children with special needs came in 1890 when children who were deaf were sent to the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Winnipeg, Manitoba (BC Ministry of Education, 2000). Throughout the following years, children with hearing or vision loss and some children with intellectual disabilities were institutionalized in various programs in the province. It was not until 1925 that recommendations from the Putnam-Weir Survey of the School System called for a curriculum for the ‘mentally handicapped’ and the beginning of ‘opportunity classes’ for students with special needs (Pudlas, 2001).

Thirty years later, the BC government provided funding for programs for ‘handicapped’ students included in the basic grant given to each school district (BC Ministry of Education, 2001). This funding provided resources in the form of teachers and other supports. This was a period of segregation; during the 1960-61 school year, “249 teachers served 3952 students

enrolled in special classes throughout British Columbia” (Andrews & Lupart, 2000, p. 28). In a period of nine years, the number of teachers and students making up the special classes increased by 341% and 285%, respectively.

In the 1970s, public attitudes towards individuals with disabilities were beginning to change. During this time, parents and professional organizations pushed for services for students with special needs to be provided within the mainstream of regular education (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Conn-Blowers & McLeod, 1989; Robichaud & Enns, 1980). Outcomes of legal action and advocacy groups led to increased “educational placement alternatives, such as resource rooms and part-time special classes, and enrolling more students with moderate and severe disabilities in public schools” (Andrews & Lupart, 2000, p. 35). Following progressive literature on the topic of special education, the decade of the 1980s saw increasing numbers of students with special needs being educated in their neighborhood schools (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). The 1981-1982 *Ministry of Education Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines* stressed the need for Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to individualize instruction based on unique learning needs (BC Ministry of Education, 2001). Despite the fact that individualized learning needs were being taken into consideration, no changes to the School Act had occurred that stated that students with special needs should be educated in the least restrictive environment (BC Ministry of Education, 2000). Effects of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 were beginning to inform the provision of special education through legal action and recommendations (BC Ministry of Education, 2001). By 1986, over half of Canadian children with special needs were attending regular schools (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). Approximately one-third of Canadian children with special needs were attending segregated classes within their neighbourhood schools and 6% were attending separate special education schools.

There was a shift towards the current principles of inclusion in the 1990s. New ideas began to take shape including merging regular and special education services into a continuum of service based on individual needs. The BC School Act of 1996 states that it is a teacher's responsibility to design, supervise, and assess individual educational programs for all students (BC Ministry of Education, 1996).

The shift towards individual instruction in the least restrictive environment has progressed over the last 100 years. The BC Ministry of Education currently defines inclusion within a least restrictive environment (LRE) framework (2000). The LRE framework stems from the Individuals with Disabilities Act in the United States and means that students are included in the regular classroom; however, this does not necessarily mean they will spend all instructional time in the classroom. Individuals' needs inform the service delivery for each student (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). Currently, controversy surrounds the level to which school systems have achieved the principles of inclusion (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Wagle & Wilcox, 1996); however, as stated by the BC Ministry of Education (2000), "the principles of inclusion and integration . . . are central to the provision of special education in British Columbia" (The Policy Framework, ¶ 8). The discussion surrounding the inclusive classrooms of BC in this study is based on this provision of inclusion in the BC education system.

In BC, students who have special needs make up approximately 11 % of the total student population (Pudlas, 2001). Due to the current School Act, teachers are responsible for all students, including students with special needs. As a result, teachers in the province must be equipped with knowledge and experiences that will enable all students to succeed. As part of the training required for teacher certification at teacher training institutions, major stakeholders in the education system agree on the need to include special education training for all preservice

teachers (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, 1999; BC Ministry of Education, 1997; BC Ministry of Education, 2000; Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Cook, 2002; Davern, 1999; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Naylor, 2002; Naylor, 2004; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). Unfortunately, this need has not translated into effective practice; special education training is inconsistent in its delivery (Bondy, Ross, Sindelar, & Griffin, 1995; Brownell et al., 2005; Cook, 2002; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Naylor, 2004; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). There is a need for research to investigate what constitutes best practice of special education training for preservice teachers (Brownell et al., 2005; Hamre & Oyler, 2004). Brownell et al. (2005) state that a “research-based link between teacher education program components and beginning teacher . . . outcomes [is] necessary” (p. 248).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Based on the research stating the need for special education training at the preservice teacher level, it is important to determine how to operationalize the best practice of special education training at teacher training institutions. New teachers can offer insights into their experiences in inclusive classrooms while also providing valuable information about the most effective practice of special education training that would have prepared them for the reality of inclusion. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the lived experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms?
2. Based on their lived experiences in inclusive classrooms, what recommendations can these new teachers offer to teacher training institutions about effective special education training for preservice teachers?

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain an understanding about the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms in order to inform future teacher training practices. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to expand on the knowledge that exists in this area by:

1. Gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of new teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms;
2. Raising an awareness of some of the knowledge and experiences new teachers need to provide instruction to today's diverse learners; and,
3. Eliciting recommendations from a sampling of new teachers on effective practice of special education training for preservice teachers.

### *Definition of Terms*

Despite the fact that the following terms may be familiar to most educators, it is important to offer definitions in order to ensure all readers use similar interpretations of the vocabulary.

Adapted educational program: "An adapted program retains the learning outcomes of the curriculum, but adaptations are provided so the student can participate in the program" (Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs, ¶ 2, BC Ministry of Education, 2001).

Inclusion: As stated by the BC Ministry of Education (2000):

The principle of inclusion adopted in British Columbia schools supports equitable access to learning by all students and the opportunity for all students to pursue their goals in all aspects of their education. The practice of

inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship, and interaction. . . . inclusion and integration do not mean that students with special needs must spend 100 per cent of every day in neighbourhood school class placements with their age and Grade peers. The goal of meeting the educational needs of all students puts the emphasis on educating students with special needs in neighbourhood school classrooms with their age and Grade peers but does not preclude the appropriate use of resource rooms, self-contained classes, community-based training or other specialized settings. (The Policy Framework, ¶ 8)

**Individual Education Plan (IEP):** Students with special needs have IEPs that outline a child's individual goals and strategies that teachers can use to help the child meet his or her goals. In order to create an IEP that will meet the unique needs of students with special needs, various teachers, assistants, parents, and other paraprofessionals meet to plan a child's education program (BC Ministry of Education, 2001).

**Learning Assistance teacher:** In most schools in BC, it is the role of the Learning Assistance (LA) teacher to provide support and resources to classroom teachers for students with special learning needs (BC Ministry of Education, 1997).

**Least Restrictive Environment:** "A placement that is least restrictive on the liberty of a student with disabilities; it does not mean the same as mainstreaming, as the most suitable placement may not be the regular class" (Andrews & Lupart, 2000, p. 553).

Modified educational program: “A modified program has learning outcomes which are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum, and specifically selected to meet the student's special needs” (Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs, ¶ 4, BC Ministry of Education, 2001).

Preservice teacher: any person that is enrolled in a teacher training program with the goal of becoming a certified teacher.

Teacher assistant: “Teacher assistants play a key role in many programs for students with special needs, performing functions which range from personal care to assisting the teacher with instructional programs” (BC Ministry of Education, 2001).

Teacher training institution: any post-secondary institution that offers an education program to graduate certified teachers.

Special need: “Students with special needs have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural nature, or have a learning disability or have exceptional gifts or talents” (BC Ministry of Education, 2001, Special Education, ¶ 3).

### *Boundaries of the Study*

This qualitative study will be conducted within a phenomenological framework. It is necessary to acknowledge the boundaries that exist in order to interpret the results within this framework.

1. Consistent with the phenomenological approach of “studying a small number of subjects” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15), this study is limited to 7 teachers in the BC public school system.

2. This study is limited to new teachers as identified by the author. The new teachers have had their first full-time teaching contract within the last five years. These new teachers are working in a public school in BC.
3. This study was limited to those participants who were willing to be interviewed about their experiences as a new teacher in an inclusive classroom and who gave permission to have the interview tape-recorded.
4. Participants' perceptions of their experiences were reflective and may have constituted a difference in what was actually experienced (Polkinghorne, 1989).
5. The data was collected between November, 2005 and May, 2006.

### *Summary*

This chapter has provided an historical overview and introduction to the heterogeneous classrooms that exist in BC public schools today. New teachers are required to meet the unique learning needs of students in these diverse classrooms. The need for teacher training institutions to examine their special education training is crucial to providing effective instruction to all learners. By listening to new teachers about their lived experiences in these classrooms, we can learn more about effective practice of special education training.

Chapter two will provide a review of the literature surrounding the changes in classroom compositions as well as the need for special education training at the preservice teacher level. An examination of the how the research has translated into practice will provide a background of the need for future research to link new teachers' experiences with best practice of special education training at the preservice level.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

This chapter will provide a background of the changing classroom context as well as the current teacher context in BC classrooms. Stemming from these changes, the literature surrounding the need for teacher training institutions to include special education training for all preservice teachers will be discussed. A review of how this research has translated into practice will follow. Finally, the need for future research will be examined.

#### *Current Classroom Context*

In classrooms across BC the number of students with special needs has increased over the last decade (Hawkey & Kuehn, 2004). This increase appears to be in contradiction with a recent report (BC Ministry of Education, 2006), which states that the number of students with special needs has decreased over the last five years. However, a critical review of this report demonstrates a decrease in overall student population as well as concurrent variability in specific special needs populations. In 2001, Pudlas reported that approximately 11% of the school-age population in BC was designated as having a special need. Currently, the BC Ministry of Education (2006) reports that 10.2% of the student population has special needs. In addition, within specific special needs designations there have been marked increases. For example, between 2000-2001 and 2005-2006, while the percentage of students designated as Gifted and those designated with Mild Intellectual Disability has decreased by 32% and 29% respectively, in the same time frame, the percentage of students with Autism and Learning Disabilities has increased by 70% and 13% respectively (BC Ministry of Education, 2006).

Despite the number of students with special needs, Naylor (2004) found there was a decreasing number of resources and supports available to teachers in the area of special

education. After reviewing Learning Assistance (LA) services in BC, the Ministry of Education found the following themes as challenges to current LA services:

1. The LA service a school receives is not based on the number of students with special needs; it is based on the number of students in that school.
2. There are not enough resources to offer programs that focus on prevention as the funding is received after difficulties are proven to exist.
3. There is always a risk that LA teachers will face reductions in time or be cut completely due to funding restraints.

With these challenges faced by LA teachers, support given to students with special needs as well as to classroom teachers is not consistent and lack of time and resources create difficulties in providing quality service to all students with special needs (BC Ministry of Education, 1997).

As the number of students with special needs increases and the resources available to classroom teachers decrease, the responsibilities of teachers are changing. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how effectively teachers believe they can handle this responsibility.

#### *Current Teacher Context*

Despite the diverse learning needs and lack of supports available to teachers, as stated by the School Act, it is the responsibility of a teacher to give instruction and to oversee the educational programs of all students (BC Ministry of Education, 1996). As a result, “teaching is an increasingly complex and demanding profession . . . [as] classrooms are more diverse than in the past” (Alberta’s Commission on Learning, 2004, *Excellent teachers and school leaders*, ¶ 5).

In a study of teachers' views on special education issues, Naylor (2002) found that over half of the respondents from a representative BC school district did not feel prepared to work with their students with special needs. Subsequently, Naylor (2004) discovered similar results with two other school districts in BC. "Over 40% of respondents in both Nanaimo and Coquitlam stated that they felt professionally unprepared to teach students with special needs" (Teacher views on Training and Practice, ¶ 1).

In a 1999 review of age demographics of teachers in BC, 47% of teachers were over the age of 44, with most of these teachers expected to retire by the year 2014 (BC Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, 2000). This situation will see an influx of new teachers entering the workforce. With a projected replacement of almost half of BC's experienced teachers with new teachers entering the profession, it is crucial that teacher training institutions are preparing new teachers to enter the diversity present in BC classrooms.

When many preservice teachers enter a generalist teacher education program, they do not have a great deal of experience with children with special needs (Hamre & Oyler, 2004). In a study investigating the confidence of preservice teachers, Goodlad and Field (1993) found that "out of the twelve skills on which students were asked to rate their level of confidence the item relating to ability to instruct students with handicaps in regular classrooms was the lowest ranking of all, by far" (p. 236). As well as not having experiences with students with special needs prior to entering a teacher education program, Lombardi and Hunka (2001) state that most general education teachers have not been adequately prepared to provide instruction for students with special needs within their teacher education programs. "Most authorities agree that the major responsibility for change rests with our higher education teacher preparation programs" (p. 183). Cook (2002) argues that if preservice teachers do not gain experience, knowledge, and

skills surrounding children with special needs in training programs, children in future classes will have a decreased opportunity to succeed.

*The Need for Special Education Training in Generalist Teacher Education Programs*

The idea of focusing on teacher education programs to better prepare our teachers is echoed throughout the literature, including major stakeholders in the education system:

(a) researchers, (b) Ministry of Education, (c) practicing teachers, and (d) parents (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, 1999; BC Ministry of Education, 1997; BC Ministry of Education, 2000; Brownell et al., 2005; Cook, 2002; Davern, 1999; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Naylor, 2002; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). In a review of preservice teacher education programs, Cook (2002) states that it is crucial to prepare preservice general education teachers to work with the diverse learning needs of current classrooms, especially given the increased number of students with special needs. Hamre and Oyler (2004) discuss the importance of special education training for all teachers and state that “small parts of preservice curriculum can have enormous effects on teachers’ future commitments” (p. 157). Strawderman and Lindsey (1995) argue that preservice teachers need a large foundation of knowledge that includes a focus on students with special needs.

The BC Ministry of Education (2000) declares the importance of including experiences, knowledge, and skills to work with students with special needs in teacher education programs.

The following recommendation is included:

The Minister of Education should encourage the British Columbia College of Teachers to ensure that all teachers who successfully complete an approved program of initial teacher education have undertaken course work that includes attention to special education as well as practica that involve work with a diverse

range of students who have special educational needs. (Human Resources, Teacher Preparation, ¶ 6)

In a review of special education in BC, the Ministry of Education (2000) states that teachers must have the requisite knowledge to work with students with special needs. “A well prepared workforce with skills needed to address the students’ educational needs is fundamental to an inclusive vision” (Teacher Preparation, ¶ 1).

In a BC Ministry of Education (1997) survey of teachers working in a representative BC school district, a theme that emerged surrounded the topic of generalist teacher education programs. Teachers felt that “teacher preparation programs should ensure that teachers are prepared for the workplace reality of special needs students in the classroom” (Enhancing or Improving Learning Assistance, ¶ 4). As part of the same survey, a challenge that was identified was the insufficient training that existed on the part of classroom teachers. Practicing teachers recommended the need for preservice teachers to gain appropriate knowledge and skills to work with students with special needs.

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) describes the concerns of parents (BCCPAC, 1999). One of the concerns voiced was the lack of teacher training in the area of special education. The solution was to “improve college level training for teachers in the area of special education, including gifted” (Additional Issues We Would like to Address, ¶ 3). Parents also voiced concerns in a study by the BC Ministry of Education (1997): “All teachers should have training in L.A./Special Education. . . . This would certainly help with identification” (Enhancing or Improving Learning Assistance, ¶ 18). In a qualitative study examining parents’ perspectives of school personnel attitudes and characteristics in inclusive

schools, Davern (1999) found “several participants felt that teachers were not adequately prepared in relation to diversity” (p. 177).

In response to the changing context of today’s classrooms, various stakeholders in the education system have demonstrated the need to include special education training within a generalist education program. It is crucial to examine whether this research has translated into practice to ensure new teachers are prepared to work within the current classroom context.

### *Translating Research into Practice*

The literature presents mixed results about programs including special education training in a generalist teacher education program; several researchers have found that programs either lack a focus on special education training or lack any special education training at all (Bondy et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 2005; Wigle & Wilcox, 1996). Stayton and McCollum (2002) state that “even with the addition of content and in some cases, field experiences, that focus on individuals with disabilities, researchers report that general education teachers are inadequately prepared to teach individuals with disabilities” (p. 212). Other researchers have found that across teacher education institutions in the United States that include special education training, there has been tremendous variety in how the training has been operationalized (Brownell et al., 2005; Cook, 2002; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). Some of the program structures have included separate coursework in special education, combined general and special education programs offering dual credentials, and infusing training in special education within pre-existing general education coursework (Brownell et al., 2005; Cook, 2002; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). The variety of program structures across teacher training programs in BC is similar.

In BC, all teacher education institutions must ensure their graduates meet uniform standards as mandated by the (BCCT) (BC College of Teachers, 2004). While having the autonomy to create individual programs, all teacher training institutions must ensure their graduates have met the following standards in relation to special education:

1. Show commitment to principles of inclusion by treating all children equitably (Education and Competence, ¶ 1).
2. Understand and apply relevant theories of human development including demonstrating an understanding of individual learning differences and special needs (Education and Competence, ¶ 6).
3. Create an environment that supports learning for all students (Education and Competence, ¶ 7).
4. [Possess] knowledge and skill to make the subject matter accessible to all students (Education and Competence, ¶ 7).

These standards are general and do not include requirements about the specific knowledge and experiences that will prepare future teachers to work with students with diverse needs. Similar to the program variety in the United States, the generality of the BCCT standards has led to a variety of program structures for special education training within elementary degree programs in BC (Naylor, 2004). These include required coursework; optional certificates, strands, and minors; and practicum experiences (Malaspina University College, 2004; Okanagan University College, 2004; Simon Fraser University, 2004; Trinity Western University, 2004; University of British Columbia, 2004; University College of the Cariboo, 2004; University of Northern British Columbia, 2004; University of Victoria, 2003). Naylor (2004) comments on this variety by stating that “it is still possible to graduate from some teacher training programs in BC without

having taken units about teaching to exceptionalities. Even in institutions where units exist and are mandatory, the focus is limited and arguably insufficient” (Teacher views on Training and Practice, ¶ 1).

Despite efforts to include special education training, there have been discrepant feelings about the effectiveness of the training from preservice teachers (Cook, 2002; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). Strawderman and Lindsey (1995) found that students who participated in field experiences were more successful in their knowledge and skills related to special education. They also found that preservice teachers believed they could successfully help students with special needs to succeed.

Not all graduates held positive feelings about their special education training (Cook, 2002; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001). Cook (2002) used both qualitative and quantitative methods to survey preservice teachers after they had received special education training within pre-existing general education coursework. “Preservice teachers reported that their teacher preparation experiences . . . are inadequate. . . . Participants expressed exasperation and apprehension regarding their lack of instructional skills and relevant teaching experiences” (p. 272). It was also found that this program did not improve confidence in the preservice teachers’ ability to adequately teach students with special needs. In a review of a program that required all preservice teachers to complete a special education strand, Lombardi and Hunka (2001) used both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine how effective students felt the special education training was. A major theme that emerged was that students wanted increased instruction or an increased number of courses in special education. “Students stated that they would like more information in general, more special education classes and hands-on

work, lecturing does not work, and add a class specifically for learning about special needs students and education” (p. 191).

The literature has produced contrasting findings about teacher education programs translating research into practice. Even in institutions where special education training exists, there is much variety in how the training is offered. Research has also shown mixed results about the effectiveness of the special education training; therefore, it is necessary to examine areas of future research.

#### *Need for Future Research*

The extant literature that examines special education training is limited as there is a lack of research done in British Columbia and it is focused on preservice teachers. The majority of studies in the area of informing preservice special education training are written by researchers from the United States (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Whitaker, 2000; Whitaker, 2003). Welch (1996) describes the ‘dual’ system of general education and special education that exists; teachers are trained as either general educators or special educators in preservice teacher training. Special education teachers in the United States receive degree-based training in special education; it is a separate program than what is offered for general education teachers. The standards for special education certification from an accredited university in the United States are set by the Council for Exception Children (CEC) (Wilcox, Putnam, Wagle, & Jackson, 1999). These standards create professional expectations for special educators.

Researchers have used new special education teachers as informants for effective training for special educators (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Whitaker, 2000; Whitaker, 2003). Whitaker (2003) surveyed new special education teachers to inform recommendations for preservice special education teacher training. Currently, as stated by the

BC Ministry of Education (2000), the BC school system utilizes an inclusive framework that results in general education teachers teaching special needs students within an inclusive classroom. While the findings of Whitaker's study are informative, the comparison of these findings is limited in BC because the experiences of new special education teachers may be different than experiences of new general education teachers in BC as their training programs provide a different focus. Research is needed in BC to examine the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms to highlight the needs of these new teachers and to begin to raise an awareness of effective teacher training for preservice teachers.

Another factor that limits research in this area is that it focuses on preservice teachers as the subjects in the research. It is important that informants of special education training for generalist teachers have had experience working within inclusive classrooms. The speculative concerns of preservice teachers may not be as informative as the experience-based concerns of new teachers. In a longitudinal study, Tomlinson et al. (1997) examine how preservice and new teachers become aware and address the needs of students with special needs. The authors use both qualitative and quantitative methods; the qualitative mode of inquiry included a classroom observation and interview. These measures were both taken during the subjects' preservice teacher training year and not during the first year of teaching. Future research must examine practicing teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms. After talking with preservice teachers in focus groups, Hamre and Oyler (2004) propose that future research needs to examine the needs of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. In her review of the literature, Whitaker (2003) reports on the results of studies conducted to examine the concerns of new teachers; however, the most recent of these studies was conducted in 1994, over ten years ago when there existed a markedly different classroom composition than today. More current research is needed to examine

experiences of new teachers within current classrooms. The idea of using new teachers to inform practice of teacher training is articulated by Whitaker as she states “teacher educators in the field of special education need to be aware of the needs of first year special education teachers . . . . the answers to these questions should help determine the curriculum for the preservice teachers” (p. 113). Similar to using new special education teachers as informants to preservice training for special education teachers, it is predicted that new general education teachers will be able to raise awareness about effective preservice general teacher training.

In order to determine effective training programs that will provide the requisite experiences and knowledge necessary for working within the current classroom context, researchers recommend using new teachers as informants for effective training (Brownell et al., 2005; Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Whitaker, 2003). Along with numerous other variables, new teachers are not a homogeneous group in regards to developmental levels of teaching (Benner & Judge, 2000) and epistemological development (Anderson et al., 1995). Benner and Judge (2000) discuss that “teaching is a talent evolving through three developmental phases: discovery, discipline, and divergence” (p. 26). Discovery is a phase through which is marked by introduction of new ideas, exploration of important concepts, and challenging assumptions. Problems are solved through case-study and problem-based study. In the discipline phase of developing teaching as a talent, characteristics of an effective teacher are developed; classroom management, being confident in decisions, and an increasing repertoire of teaching techniques are all developed in this phase. The final level is divergence and this phase is one in which effective adaptations are made to what is known in order to fit the needs of the individual contexts in teaching, including instruction based on individual need, and individual goals based

on ability. The particular phase that new teachers are in will influence their beliefs about their effectiveness and abilities in relation to inclusion and diversity in a classroom.

Anderson et. al (1995) describe teaching as complex due to the following factors: (a) it is multidimensional as many events occur simultaneously, (b) it is uncertain as particular actions do not have guaranteed outcomes, and (c) goals and values influence decisions which affect individual students and groups of students, making teaching a social and ethical initiative. Anderson et al. (1995) discuss a continuum of epistemological beliefs, or how frameworks of knowledge are built in response to these complexities of teaching. They argue that where a preservice teacher is on the continuum will affect their beliefs about teaching. A first stage is an absolutist orientation in which there is a belief that there is one right answer for every problem or question. This stage is followed by a multiplist-relativist orientation with beliefs that every situation is unique and all solutions or approaches are equally valid. The next stage on the continuum is an evaluative orientation in which the belief is that even though there may not be one right answer, some answers are better and there is a set of criteria for making judgements about possible solutions to problems. New teachers may be at different points of this continuum and where they are situated on the continuum may affect how they perceive their experiences in inclusive classrooms and also what recommendations they offer to teacher training institutions. It is important to consider the developmental and epistemological level of new teachers as they share their experiences and provide recommendations to teacher training institutions.

The literature that examines best practice of special education training is inconclusive and there are areas that would benefit from additional research (Brownell et al., 2005; Hamre & Oyler, 2004). Several researchers concur about the importance of continued research to measure the effectiveness of teacher education programs (Bay & Lopez-Reyna, 1997; Lombardi &

Hunka, 2001). Past research that has examined the effectiveness of special education training has been conducted through a variety of research designs, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches. Quantitative approaches have included surveys (Cook, 2002; Ruhl & Hall, 2002; Whitaker, 2003). These surveys have measured very specific variables, such as teacher beliefs towards integration, benefits of integration, perceived ability to teach students with disabilities, or perceived levels of assistance required and received. While these specific variables give a detailed picture of one aspect of a preservice teacher, it is only one piece of the whole experience faced by a teacher. Qualitative approaches have included journal entries (Bay & Lopez-Reyna, 1997; Ensign, 2002); case studies (Lovingfoss, 2001), on-line forums (Werts, Mamlin, and Pogoloff, 2002), focus groups (Hamre & Oyler, 2004), and interviews combined with observations and focus groups (Benner & Judge, 2000). There are some limitations of the particular qualitative approaches that were used, including the journal entries and on-line forums that were completed by participants as part of course requirement in their teacher training. Some students may have reported based on what was expected of the course rather than their honest responses. While the case study method provided an in-depth examination of one preservice teacher's experience, this experience may be different than the experiences faced by other preservice teachers. In order to address the need for future research to examine the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms, future research must address the limitations of previous research. Qualitative research will be informative as it will provide a contextual picture of the experiences faced by new teachers rather than focusing on specific variables within their experiences (Patton, 1990). Within the qualitative approach, in order to examine the experiences faced by new teachers, a phenomenological approach will allow the underlying structure, or essence, of the experiences faced by new teachers to become evident. This underlying structure

of experience can begin to raise an awareness of best practice of special education training for preservice teachers. Based on their current experiences with the heterogeneous classrooms of today, new teachers can help to raise awareness of best practice of special education training within a generalist teacher education program.

### *Summary*

Today's classrooms have increasing numbers of students with special needs as well as decreasing resources available to support classroom teachers. This discrepancy has led to added responsibility on the part of teachers. As has been the case for several years, many practicing teachers do not feel prepared to teach students with special needs in their classrooms. Coupled with recent classroom changes, this situation has highlighted the crucial need for special education training for all classroom teachers. There has been a multitude of research stating the need to include special education training within generalist teacher education programs to better prepare our future teachers. Based on this need for training, it is important to identify how the research has translated into practice. The literature describes discrepant results about generalist teacher education programs including special education training and mixed results about the effectiveness of the training that exists. The current research is limited by the focus on preservice teachers as informants as well as the lack of generalizability of studies conducted in the United States to the BC education system. In order to identify what constitutes the best practice of special education training for generalist teachers, there is a need for research to investigate the knowledge and experiences new teachers need for inclusive classrooms. This research can be initiated through an understanding of the lived experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Based on their experiences, new teachers can provide initial recommendations regarding effective special education training. By preparing preservice teachers to enter the

heterogeneous classrooms of today, we will be helping to ensure that generations of future teachers will be able to provide success for generations of future learners.

Therefore, the rationale for conducting the current study follows from the multitude of research indicating the need to include special education training for preservice teachers. The mixed results of the extant literature have illustrated the inconsistencies in operationalizing best practice. Based on the limitations of previous research, this study will gain an understanding of the lived experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms in order to raise an awareness and begin to lay a foundation of knowledge regarding the needs of these new teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter three will introduce the qualitative approach that will be used in this study. Specifically, a phenomenological design will be described. Following, there will be a discussion about the participants and data collection and analysis that will be used for this study. Issues of rigor and ethical considerations will also be included.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

This chapter provides a background of the methodology used in this study to investigate the research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms?
2. Based on their lived experiences in inclusive classrooms, what recommendations can these new teachers offer to teacher training institutions about effective special education training for preservice teachers?

This chapter will outline and justify the qualitative research paradigm used to investigate the research questions. Included in this chapter is information about the research design, participants, procedures, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. The author has included her reflections with the research process throughout this discussion. Issues of rigor and ethical considerations will also be addressed.

#### *General Approach*

A qualitative approach will be used to investigate the experiences of a sample of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. As stated by Polkinghorne (2005) “a primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness” (p. 138). Qualitative inquiry uses humans’ natural language and experience to gain a deep understanding of a particular topic (Polkinghorne, 1989). Anderson and Arsenault (1998) discuss the effectiveness of qualitative research in providing descriptive evidence and an understanding of a particular phenomenon. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of new teachers, the qualitative approach is the most effective approach for this study.

*Research Design*

Consistent with the research question of exploring the experiences of new teachers, the author used a phenomenological research design in order to investigate individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990, Polkinghorne, 1989). Patton (1990) states that "phenomenological inquiry focuses on the question: 'what is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?'" (p. 69). By studying the essence, or underlying structure, of experience of a sample of new teachers in inclusive classrooms, an awareness of what knowledge and experiences these new teachers need will help to inform preservice special education training. Phenomenology is not restricted by goals to predict or control, but rather to gain a meaningful understanding of an individual's experience; these individual experiences provide evidence to inform the essence of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). "Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Despite the fact that there might be many perspectives of new teachers' experiences, a phenomenological research design will reveal what constitutes the underlying structure of this experience. In order to address the need for research to examine the needs of new teachers, the phenomenological approach will enable the author to uncover the underlying structure or essence of the experience. Based on this underlying structure of experience, the author will be able to raise an awareness of the needs of new teachers and an awareness of best practice of special education training at teacher training institutions. This initial awareness will provide directions for future research in this area.

Within phenomenological inquiry, there are two orientations which form the points of a continuum depending upon the goals of the study and on the philosophical approach of the

researcher (Lopez & Willis, 2004). At one point of the continuum is interpretative phenomenology which is associated with Heidegger; this orientation links an individual's experiences to their cultural, social, and political surroundings. At another point of the continuum is descriptive phenomenology, which is associated with Husserl and is concerned with uncovering the essence of human experience. Lopez and Willis (2004) state the three philosophical assumptions of descriptive phenomenology:

1. Human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real (p. 727); [therefore],
2. Human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study. (p. 727)
3. There are features to any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the experience. These are referred to as universal essences. (p. 728)

Consistent with the research question of finding the essence of experience for new teachers in inclusive classrooms, descriptive phenomenology is considered a good fit. Van Manen (2002) argues that a descriptive approach is appropriate when phenomenological research is conducted in a professional setting, as is the situation for this research. This form of inquiry is also considered the most appropriate for the present study as its goal is to provide detailed descriptions of participants' experiences in order to inform future research. Van Manen further describes the phenomenology of practice orientation in which professional practitioners study the essence of "everyday life concerns of people" in order to apply the new understandings within their professional domains (Phenomenology of Practice, ¶ 3). Through the phenomenology of practice orientation, the author will describe the essence of the experience of new teachers in inclusive classrooms in order to lay a foundation of knowledge regarding best practice of special education training for preservice teachers.

*Entering Assumptions*

Consistent with a descriptive phenomenological approach, it is “essential for the researcher to shed all prior personal knowledge to grasp the essential lived experiences of those being studied” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 727). Researchers must suspend their own knowledge or experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). This suspension is called bracketing and it encourages that all judgements made about what is real to be founded from the participants (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Maggs-Rapport, F., 2001; Moustakas, 1994). The author acknowledges the difficulties with approaching the data with a completely unbiased perspective; however, she appreciates the process of separating one’s own knowings and experiences and will keep a research journal in order to maintain an awareness of her own feelings in order to separate them from the ideas as experienced by the participants.

*From my journal: This topic is very important to me, as I myself am a new teacher working in inclusive classrooms. The biases I bring into this study include the belief that current practice of preservice special education training is not sufficient in preparing future teachers for the reality of inclusion. I believe that teachers cannot enter the teaching profession already knowing all that there is to know about teaching; however, I do believe that careful training can influence the knowledge and confidence of preservice teachers and that this will have a lasting impact on countless future students. Because of my strong beliefs, I will include my reflections in this study and interview myself then use this personal lens to describe and uncover in more detail my own feelings and beliefs. It is my intention that this study will serve as an initial stage in a change process that will see increased attention to issues of diversity and inclusion in preservice curriculum in BC.*

In order to bracket her own assumptions about the experiences of new teachers, the following assumptions are acknowledged by the researcher:

1. People will be honest with responses;
2. Participants will be expected to accurately carry out the instructions provided by the researcher;
3. Experiences of new teachers will be different than experiences of teachers who have taught for several years as new teachers do not have years of teaching experience to inform their teaching practice; new teachers' practice will be informed by teacher training and previous life experience;
4. Based on the review of the literature, new teachers in inclusive classrooms may have some negative experiences due to the changing composition of today's classrooms (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2004; BC Ministry of Education, 1997) and the decreasing resources available to support teachers (BC Ministry of Education, 1997; Naylor, 2002; Naylor, 2004);
5. It is expected that by gaining an understanding of the essence of new teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms that this will inform preservice teachers as to what their beginning experiences in inclusive classrooms may be like.
6. New teachers' experiences will be able to inform effective practice of preservice teacher general education training.
7. As a phenomenological researcher, it is believed that humans can consciously express their lived experiences (Creswell, 1998) and that there "is an essence or essences to shared experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

### *Participants*

Consistent with a qualitative approach, the author used purposeful sampling to develop an understanding of the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms (Creswell, 2005).

Participants were selected on the basis that they met the following definition of a new teacher: new teachers have had their first full-time teaching contract within the last five years. These new teachers were also working in the BC public school system. This sampling strategy is characteristic of homogeneous sampling (Creswell, 2005). The inclusion criteria used to define a new teacher ensured that participants had experience with responsibilities surrounding planning and assessment within the heterogeneous classrooms that exist in public schools in BC. In contrast to more experienced teachers, new teachers are not able to draw upon years of teaching experience to inform their teaching practice; new teachers' practice is informed by teacher training as well as previous life experience.

It is important to consider what talent developmental level (Benner & Judge, 2000) and epistemological developmental level (Anderson et al., 1995) each new teacher is at because these variables are integral to both the experiences new teachers have and recommendations they provide for teacher training. Based on each participant's comments during the first interviews, the author took into consideration what talent developmental level the teacher was in (Benner & Judge, 2000). During the second interviews, the author asked each participant directly what phase they felt they were in. Both the author's interpretations and the participant's self-evaluations were similar. Although the participants did not range across the entire continuum of developmental levels, there was some variation; two participants at the discipline phase of teaching with a focus on increasing confidence in decision making and increasing classroom management repertoire. Five of the participants were in the divergence phase in which effective adaptations are made to what is known to fit individual student's needs. The author followed the same format to conclude that the participants had a variety of orientations regarding epistemological development (Anderson et. al, 1995). Based on the participants' answers during

the second interview, the author determined that three participants were in the second part of the continuum: multiplist-relativist orientation with the belief that every situation is unique and all solutions or approaches are equally valid. Two participants were in the evaluative orientation with the belief that some answers are better than others and there is a set of criteria for making judgements. One participant was at the absolutist orientation with the belief that there is one right answer for every problem or question.

Following approval from the University of Victoria Human Resources Ethics Committee (see Appendix A), participants were recruited with posters advertising the study in various locations in the MacLaurin Building at the University of Victoria and an email announcement through the BC Teachers' Federation new teacher's list serve (see Appendix B). Consistent with the phenomenological approach of "studying a small number of subjects" (Creswell, 2003, p. 15), the author included 7 participants that met the criteria and constituted a diverse range of new teachers in BC. A profile of participants is provided in chapter four. In addition to the 7 participants, the author included herself in the study by reflecting on her own experiences as a new teacher. As the author is a non-enrolling teacher and therefore does not meet all criteria for inclusion in this study, her reflections will be juxtaposed in italics throughout the description of the results.

*From my journal: It was interesting for me to determine what my developmental level was in teaching and where I was situated on the continuum of epistemological knowledge. As I reflected on my own interview transcript that I did in November, I noted that I was in the discovery phase of teaching; however, now, in May, I find myself in the discipline phase of teaching. I am now starting to increase the repertoire of techniques I use and I am much more confident in my decisions. I do feel I touch on certain aspects of the divergence phase in that I do adapt my instruction based on individual need. As far as my own epistemological*

*beliefs, I believe I am entering the evaluative orientation as I believe that certain situations lead to solutions that are more appropriate than others and throughout the year, I have come to learn through experience what possible solutions to problems are more appropriate than others and I am developing my own set of criteria for evaluating my decisions. For example, reviewing past decisions and reflecting on their outcomes and determining what aspects of my past decisions are applicable to the new situation.*

*I also realize that it is difficult for me to determine exactly where I fit into these continuums; therefore, judging where others fit based on their first interviews may not be completely accurate. As well, it was very difficult to determine placement on both the talent development continuum and the epistemological belief continuum using the participant's comments so I felt for the second interview I would try to ask them directly. While comparing my evaluations of the participants' developmental levels with their self-evaluations, I noted one conflict with one of the participants who determined she was in the multiplist-relativist orientation during the second interview; however specific statements she had made during the first interview led me to believe that she was in the absolutist orientation. This participant wanted a handbook to give her all of the right answers to her problems. This discrepancy could have been due to the time difference between the first and second interviews. I do feel though, that I have an accurate estimate of placement for each participant as almost all of my interpretations matched with the participants' self-evaluations.*

### *Interviews*

Interviews with participants were used as a way of investigating the research questions of the study. As stated by Polkinghorne (2005), "language is our primary access to people's experiences" (p. 139). Interviews are the preferred method of data collection in phenomenological research (Polkinghorne, 1989). Through a discussion with each participant, the author's purpose was to gain a comprehensive account of the experiences faced by each of

the new teachers interviewed. Moustakas (1994) provides a description of the phenomenological interview:

[It] involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. Although the primary researcher may in advance develop a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon, these are varied . . . when the [participant] shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question. (p. 114)

Open-ended questions permit the researcher to understand participants on "their own terms" without the researcher having predetermined ideas of the points of view of other people (Patton, 1990, p. 24). In order to create an environment through which participants inform their own themes, the author created a semi-structured guide of questions that was used during interviews (see Appendix D). "The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject" (Patton, 1990, p. 283).

The author reviewed related literature that employed interviews for data collection (Davern, 1999; Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Schumm et al., 1995; Tomlinson et al., 1997). As part of a mixed-method study, Tomlinson et al. (1997) interviewed preservice teachers about their ability to address the academic diversity in their practicum classrooms. The goals of the interview in this study, as well as the other related studies, did not coincide with the goal of the present study: to "evok[e] a comprehensive account of [a] person's experience of [a] phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). While keeping within the goal of the present study and to ask questions that would lead to detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences, the author used Patton's (1990) and Moustakas' (1994) examples of effective types of questions to inform

her interview guide. Background questions were included to gain a more complete understanding of each participant. The author also included questions about the participants' recommendations for teacher training institutions in order to address the third purpose of the study. Before interviews began, the author collaborated with members of her supervisory committee to refine the interview guide.

Brantlinger et al. (2005) discusses that using an interview protocol with flexibility is important "so that questions may be modified or added to as preliminary evidence emerges" (p. 198). The author used questions from the interview protocol to begin discussion of the topic, to maintain conversational flow, as well as to redirect the discussion to the topic of interest. It was the author's goal that each subject was free to describe their experience in inclusive classrooms as they felt the experience should be described. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility within the interview to allow the participants to discuss their own experiences, while also providing consistency to the interviews in ensuring participants are asked the same questions.

*From my journal: Also being a new teacher, I found that I could really relate to the experiences the participants were sharing with me. I found it very difficult to remain neutral and not respond with enthusiastic nods of agreement. I also found that as participants were sharing their experiences with me, that their experience would trigger a similar situation that I had encountered. I found that as soon as the interview was over, the participants wanted to continue to share their experiences and for one participant I had to turn the tape recorder back on to record their continued dialogue. I also had more than one participant thank me for the opportunity to share their experience as they often felt like no one wanted to listen. I was grateful for the opportunity to be able to listen to these new teachers' experiences and this further propelled me to want to make their voices heard to impact future change.*

*Data Collection*

The data in qualitative research are in the form of descriptions or accounts of lived experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). The data provided evidence of the characteristics of the experiences faced by new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Before the researcher began the process of interviewing the participants, pilot interviews took place in order to familiarize the author with the interviewing process. These pilot interviews also served to familiarize the author with specific interview techniques that supported the purposes of the study such as using clarifying and elaborating probes to participants' responses to provide more detail or more depth, respectively (Creswell, 2005; Seidman, 1998). Following recruitment, participants were contacted by telephone to introduce the researcher to the participant and discuss the purpose of the study as well as the informed consent required to participate. Following, the researcher discussed a meeting time and place convenient for the participant. There were two interviews for each participant.

At the beginning of the first interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form and discussed issues of anonymity and withdrawal (see Appendix C). The first interviews began with a statement of the researcher's purpose of the interview: to gain an understanding of the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. As stated by Patton (1990), "understanding the purpose of the interview will increase the motivation of the interviewee to respond openly and in detail" (p. 327). Each interview followed a semi-structured interview protocol and, as recommended by Seidman (1998), was tape-recorded for the author to later review. Each participant was informed that they would be contacted after the first interview to find a convenient time to conduct the second interview.

After the author completed all of the first interviews, a preliminary analysis took place to determine major themes present in each interview. Following this analysis, participants were sent a copy of the transcribed interview as well as the preliminary analysis to confirm the accuracy of the transcription as well as the first stage of analysis. The author then set up a convenient time for the second interview. The second interview was a telephone interview and during this interview, the author asked questions to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences faced by the new teachers (Appendix D). The author asked questions that contributed to a deeper understanding of the participant's experience. After the first interview, the participant may have reflected on other dimensions of their experience that were not previously mentioned. This second interview served to provide a deeper understanding of the experience by allowing participants to add further reflections to ensure a comprehensive account of their experience. To ensure a positive relationship, a thank you note with a gift certificate for a coffee treat was sent to each of the participants.

#### *Procedure for Data Analysis*

The procedure used for data analysis was informed by Colaizzi (1978) and Roberts and Cairns (1999). A journal was kept including the author's interests and experiences with the study as well as reflections about the decisions that were made throughout the analysis of the data. The author's recognition of her own interests and experiences with the topic of study served as a constant reference to ensure that themes that emerged from the data were not simply a reflection of the author's own interests or experiences, but rather a description of the essence of the participants' experience. The first entry in the journal was a full description of the author's own experience of the phenomenon. The author transcribed verbatim all interviews from the tape-

recorder. The author also included nonverbal signals including: pauses, sighs, laughs, and interruptions in order to maintain an accurate representation of the interview (Seidman, 1998).

Consistent with the work of Roberts and Cairns (1999), after all interviews were transcribed, the author read and reread each transcript in order to gain an understanding of the overall meaning of each interview. Following, the author extracted significant statements from each of the transcripts and then formulated themes from these extracted statements. The author then sent the transcript as well as the listing of themes to each participant for verification (Appendix E). All participants verified the transcript and concurred with the themes. After all participants had verified the transcripts and initial analyses, a second telephone interview with each participant took place. During this interview, the author took detailed notes as the participants shared additional experiences of their inclusive classrooms. As mentioned above, this second interview served to provide a deeper understanding of the new teachers' experiences. Data analysis for the second interviews followed the same format as for the first interviews, with the result being a complete listing of themes for each participant. Listings of themes along with their supporting statements for each participant were typed and printed using a different font in order to visually track common themes across participants. The author cut up the themes with the supporting statements from each interview and grouped them according to their central meaning. After groups had been made, only two themes from individual participants were left over. One of these leftover themes was 'lack of consistent school hours.' This participant described his experience in an isolated school that faced repeated closures due to power outages, road closures, and extreme weather. The leftover themes were later analyzed in the context of the analysis and the author determined they were not appropriate to the larger context. The theme groupings that resulted contained support from at least three of the participants.

*From my journal: As I began to sort through themes from each participant, I was thinking of including a theme only if it had support from four (more than half) of the participants. I quickly realized; however, that using this cutoff, I was eliminating themes that I knew were important to my participants. I decided to that I needed to share my participants' voices and decided to include themes if I noticed the trend from three out of the seven participants. While I do have the percentages for each theme, I decided not to report these in the discussion section as my objective was to share the voices of the new teachers. In keeping with the goals of the study, I decided that salience was more important than percentages.*

Theme groupings were then labeled and supporting statements for each theme were organized into folders. Following, the author grouped the theme folders into related clusters. Each cluster was labeled according to its central meaning and was colour coded. Finally, the author grouped clusters into categories. These categories were labeled according to their central meaning and included: (a) student diversity, (b) collaboration, and (c) curriculum. To assist with verification and validity, the author's supervisor reviewed the categories, clusters, and themes.

The categories, clusters, and themes that resulted were used to describe the essential essence of the experience of the new teachers in their inclusive classrooms. This description, along with the categories, clusters, and themes were sent to participants for final verification. Six of the seven participants replied in agreement; no response came from the seventh participant.

As the author did not meet all criteria for participation in this study, her completed interview protocol was not included in the analysis process; however, her reflections will be juxtaposed throughout the description of the results in Chapter 4.

### *Rigor*

As stated by Patton (2002), it is crucial that phenomenological research is rigorous in order to ensure that the essence of the experience can be accurately identified. Brantlinger et al.

(2005) discuss that qualitative research is sound if the researcher has addressed issues of credibility. The author used several measures to ensure a rigorous study. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audiotapes by the author to ensure experimenter consistency. The author demonstrated research reflexivity by being clear about her assumptions before conducting the study. The researcher discussed her reasons for coming to this topic and has been self-aware regarding her own thoughts by sharing excerpts from her research journal. First level member checks were included when the author sent the transcripts and initial analysis to participants for verification; second level member checks occurred after the second interview as the author verified analyses and final categories, clusters, and themes with participants. These member checks also ensured that the voices of participants' were heard accurately throughout the discussion. The author provided an audit trail by keeping a record of dates and times in which the interviews were conducted in order to "document and substantiate that sufficient time was spent in the field to claim dependable and confirmable results" (p. 201). Finally, to help with verification and validity, the researcher's supervisor examined themes, clusters, and categories. In addition to these measures of rigor, the author attended to the following standards to ensure quality in her qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2005).

1. The research question is consistent with a qualitative framework with a single focus on the phenomenon of new teachers' experience instead of a relationship or comparison (as in quantitative research),
2. Data collection and analysis were conducted within the framework of descriptive phenomenology,
3. Analysis of the data was conducted on multiple levels (categories, clusters, and themes) to represent the complexity of the experience,

*Ethical Considerations*

Following approval from the Human Resources Ethics Committee (Appendix A), participants were recruited and contacted. All participants were informed their participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were required to sign a permission form and they were informed their data would be kept anonymous. All information gathered from participants was not kept with any identifying information attached; data is kept in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after five years.

*Summary*

Chapter three provided an introduction to the phenomenological qualitative research approach that was used in this study. The author's entering assumptions were discussed as well as the participants, interview process, data collection and analysis the author used in this study. A discussion regarding the rigor and the ethical considerations of the study was also provided.

## Chapter Four

### Results

This chapter provides a description of the results of the seven interviews with new teachers in inclusive classrooms. This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section will provide a brief description of the participants who were interviewed. The second section will outline the essential structure of the experience of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Next, categories, clusters, and themes underlying this experience will be outlined. Finally, recommendations from the new teachers to help prepare preservice teachers are presented. These recommendations are intended for teacher training institutions and school districts to raise an awareness of the knowledge and experiences new teachers need in today's diverse classrooms.

#### *Participant Profile*

The participants in this study have been assigned pseudo-names to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. While the participants had varied life experiences and training, they were consistent with their views regarding the goals of education. These uniform views fit within the BC Ministry of Education goal of education (BC Ministry of Education, 2001) and each participant described their role as a teacher in an inclusive classroom within the role of a teacher as outlined by the BC School Act (BC Ministry of Education, 1996). The researcher herself is a new teacher and she has included reflections that are juxtaposed in italics throughout the description of the results. It should be noted that the researcher is a non-enrolling teacher and her reflections will be written from the perspective of a Learning Assistance and Integration Support teacher.

*Laura* is a first year Grade 2/3 teacher at a school 45 minutes from Fort St. James. Laura does not remember taking any special education training in teacher education. She worked with children with Autism before starting her teacher career.

*Amy* is in her second year of teaching. Her current position is a Grade 8 Language Arts and French teacher at a middle school in Abbotsford. She took the Learning Support Strand offered during her teacher training and she has also taken several workshops on special education. Amy has volunteer and work experience with children with special needs.

*Harry* spent a year substitute teaching and is now in his first full-time teaching position teaching Kindergarten to Grade 2 at a community school on Vancouver Island. He took one special education course in teacher training as well as numerous developmental psychology courses. He also has work experience with children with special needs.

*Catherine* graduated last year and is teaching Grade six/seven at a middle school on one of the Gulf Islands. She has taken one special education course. Catherine described having been diagnosed with learning disabilities herself and she offered that her brother has fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

*Julie* spent a year teaching in England and is now in a full-time position teaching Grade one in Cranbrook. Julie remembers taking one special education course. She did not have any prior experience working with children with special needs before teaching.

*Trisha* has had three years teaching experience. One of her first teaching contracts included teaching Grade 8 science at a middle school in the Lower Mainland. Trisha remembers taking one course in special education. Trisha did not have any experience with children with special needs prior to teaching.

*Ruby* has spent two years substitute teaching and is currently teaching in Victoria. She teaches Grade four and five learning support including in-classroom teaching. Ruby took one course on special education as well she has attended one workshop on special education designations. She worked with children with diverse needs before her teaching career as a care attendant at an after-school care facility.

*My reflection: I am a new teacher in my first full-time teaching position. I teach Learning Assistance and Early Literacy Intervention and I am also the Integration Support teacher at my school. I teach at a Kindergarten through Grade five school in Sooke. I took a Learning Support Strand during my teacher training as well as I am completing my master's degree in Special Education. I have also had several years of volunteer experiences working with children with special needs at Queen Alexandra Center for Children's Health and through Operation Trackshoes at the University of Victoria.*

Despite the participants' diverse backgrounds, several consistencies became apparent as they described their experiences in their inclusive classrooms.

#### *Essential Structure of the Experience*

This study investigated the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. In order to understand the essential structure of new teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms, participants were selected based on their recent experience with teacher training as well as their positions as new teachers in inclusive classrooms. The goal of the research was to raise an awareness of the needs of new teachers in their inclusive classrooms. Participants also provided recommendations for teacher training institutions.

Participants clearly discussed the diverse range of students in their inclusive classrooms. The new teachers perceived spending a disproportionate amount of time with struggling students; this led to the belief that they were not always meeting the needs of the higher achieving students

in their classrooms. Participants also described a group of students in the grey area; those students who were struggling and did not meet BC Ministry of Education designation criteria.

In order to meet the diverse needs of students in their classrooms, participants discussed how they collaborated with their colleagues to assist with strategies for instruction, classroom management, and developing routines in their classrooms. For their students with special needs, participants enjoyed collaborating with members of the IEP teams in planning sessions and meetings. Participants also reflected how they relied on other students in their classrooms to augment their instruction and to act as peer tutors for less capable students. Parent relationships were seen as both supportive and challenging.

Participants shared how they had to address their students' social and behavioural concerns through an alternative curriculum that often overshadowed the prescribed academic curriculum. The new teachers reflected that they did not spend as much time as they wanted on academics as they felt their students' behaviour and social concerns were often more important. When the prescribed curriculum was followed, participants shared how they used adaptations to ensure their students were successful. These adaptations included individualized instruction and alternative forms of assessment. Due to the large number of students requiring adaptations, the new teachers felt frustrated at the lack of time to adapt the curriculum and their lack of experience in doing so.

As a result of their experiences in inclusive classrooms, participants had several recommendations for teacher training institutions and school districts. The new teachers wanted more practical experience working in inclusive classrooms either in the form of an extended practicum, or required volunteer hours before teacher training. The new teachers strongly recommended that the insights of current teachers need to be shared with preservice teachers

during their teacher education programs. Further, due to the number of challenges they faced during their first teaching experiences, the new teachers wanted a mentorship program to facilitate ongoing conversations with an experienced teacher about their questions and concerns.

### *Categories, Clusters, and Themes*

After analyzing the interviews, three categories emerged from the data: (1) Student Diversity, (2) Collaboration, and (3) Curriculum (Table 1). One of these categories was comprised of three clusters and the other two categories were comprised of two clusters.

Table 1: Categories and Clusters

Categories		
Student Diversity	Collaboration	Curriculum
Clusters within each Category		
Range of Ability	Collaboration with Colleagues	Alternative Curriculum
Not Meeting Ministry Designations	Parental Considerations	Adaptations
	Student Collaboration	

### *Category One: Student Diversity*

Participants described the tremendous diversity present in their classrooms. As a result of this diversity, the new teachers perceived a difficulty in meeting the needs of all students. They specifically shared concerns with not meeting the needs of higher achievers in their classrooms. Participants also described the grey area students: those students who were struggling and did not meet Ministry criteria for designations. This category contains two clusters: (a) Range of Ability and (b) Not Meeting Ministry Designations. The themes that comprise these clusters are outlined in Table 2. Participant quotations are included in the description of each theme to enhance meaning.

Table 2: Category One: Student Diversity

Clusters	
Range of Ability	Not Meeting Ministry Designations
Focus on Lower Achieving Students	Grey Area Students
Not Meeting the Needs of Higher Achieving Students	

*Cluster one: Range of ability.*

Participants described the wide range of ability of students in their inclusive classrooms. Combined with the restraints of a school day schedule, these teachers felt that they focused a disproportionate amount of time on the lower achieving students. This unequal focus did not leave enough time or energy for the higher achieving students. The themes that are included in this cluster are: (a) Focus on Lower Achieving Students and (b) Not Meeting the Needs of Higher Achieving Students.

*Focus on lower achieving students.* Participants shared a concern that most of their time was spent with their “struggling” (Julie) or lower achieving students. These lower achieving students struggled both academically and behaviourally. For example, Trisha commented that “for the students who needed the extra support, so this is the academic support, I would wander more often to their area and see how they were doing and give them more prompts.” Julie shared how she focused on her students that were struggling with the curriculum. “I try to get around to all of them but obviously with the focus being on my three ones that aren’t quite at the level in which the class is.”

Participants shared that they not only focused their energies on the students who were struggling academically, but also the students with behavioural challenges. Harry described one of his students with whom he constantly attended to ensure that he was not running around the room. Catherine reported how she spent her time managing one of her student's disrupting behaviours.

I had one child who actually was identified ADHD and he didn't have any support. . . . [He] was off medication so I would spend most of my time making sure he was on task because once he was off task everybody else would get off task.

Participants discussed their awareness of the disproportionate time they spent with their struggling students; however, this did not change their focus. Amy stated that "you want to make sure that you are not focusing all of your time on [the struggling] kids . . . but you need more time because you have to help out everyone else in your class too."

*My reflection: I find that as a Learning Assistance teacher, I am supporting the same needy students throughout the course of a week and that this is at the expense of supporting other students. These students may not be as needy as the students who are designated, but they also need extra support to meet their grade level expectations. It is difficult to find the balance to give time to the needy students who need to acquire a basic understanding of reading and writing and also to the students who just require that extra boost.*

With such a large focus on the lower achieving students, participants reported that there were other students in their inclusive classrooms who were not receiving adequate instruction and attention. These students were identified as higher achieving students.

*Not meeting the needs of higher achieving students.* Due to their heightened focus on lower achieving students, participants felt they were frequently not able to meet the needs of

their higher achieving students. Some of these students had 'gifted' designations and others were not designated but were achieving above grade level expectations. "I had two gifted students and after the year was over I felt bad that I couldn't help them as much as I now know I could have helped" (Trisha). Catherine reflected that she was not able to challenge her higher achieving students.

There were a couple of kids in the class that weren't challenged enough on a regular basis because I had to do so much focus on building community in the class. . . . It was hard with [one of the gifted students] because he was really smart, I feel that I didn't do enough for that kid because there were so many behaviour problems in the class.

While these teachers felt that they had not adequately met the needs of their higher achieving students, they did share a variety of strategies that they attempted to fill this inequality. Julie described how she partnered her higher achieving students together so they could "get that extra challenge from each other." Trisha motivated her students with gifted designations through extra projects and timing. "Because they were very perfectionistic in terms of getting it done once they got started, I tried to give them a time limit and once they got it done they could move on to the projects."

Along with the lower and higher achieving students, students that did not meet Ministry designations added to the diversity of the inclusive classrooms.

*Cluster two: Not meeting ministry designations.*

Participants expressed their frustrations with struggling students in their classrooms who did not meet Ministry designation guidelines and therefore did not qualify to be considered as

having special needs. These students were referred to as “grey area” (Amy) students. This cluster is comprised of one theme: Grey Area Students.

*Grey area students.* The BC Ministry of Education defines these students as those who are not designated as having a special need but who are struggling with meeting their grade level curricular expectations (BC Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1997). Catherine described one student in her class who was designated at his previous school (out of province), but did not meet designation criteria in BC. She shared that this student did not receive any LA support and that his previous teacher did not recognize his unique learning needs and therefore did not adapt any of his instruction or assessments. “He hated school and hated everything that he did.” While others had not recognized support or adaptations for this student, Catherine felt an obligation to meet his individual needs.

Similarly, Amy was concerned about the future for one of her students that had recently lost his Ministry designation.

This kid is the poster child for grey area children. He was designated LD (Learning Disabled) in elementary school. Then he was reassessed this year and he lost his LD designation because there isn't the discrepancy anymore but he wasn't low enough for M-ID [Moderate Intellectual Disability]. His program is modified across the board. His schedule is different than the rest of the kids. He does his modified work in the mornings with the behaviour counselor and then he helps out in the exploration courses in the afternoons. This schedule has brought his attendance up this year. He is also borderline for moderate behaviour but didn't get this designation either. He goes to [name of school] next year and without a designation he won't get the help he needs and without help this kid

will drop out. Right now, we are doing what we can to make it work for this kid, but next year unless someone does more than they should or takes him under their wing, he may drop out.

In addition to problems with reassessment, other participants revealed problems with assessment waitlists. Trisha described a situation in which she suspected students may have met Ministry requirements for designation, but the testing waitlist was so long that no designation could be given to these students. “There were the red flag students but there was such a backlog on testing that we just ended up adapting or modifying their programs. Even with a lot of adaptations, these students would struggle so hard.”

*My reflection: I struggle with ‘labeling’ a child as it has such negative connotations for parents. It is difficult to help parents understand that the Ministry designations are helpful to educators as they inform the planning of the child’s educational program. The level 1, 2, and 3 designations are funded and they give support hours to the school, perhaps in the form of Teacher assistants. It is frustrating when a child needs the support of a designation and meets almost all criterion for designation but does not have the required paperwork to meet a designation (doctor’s letter for chronic health or community involvement for intensive behaviour).*

In order to meet their students’ diverse learning needs, participants relied on collaboration with teachers, parents, and students.

#### *Category Two: Collaboration*

As a result of the student diversity in their classrooms, participants spoke of how they collaborated with colleagues, students, and parents to help meet the learning needs of the students in their inclusive classrooms. This category includes three clusters: (a) Collaboration with Colleagues, (b) Parental Considerations, and (c) Student Collaboration. The themes that

make up these clusters are described in Table 3. A thorough description of each cluster with participation quotations to enhance meaning is included.

Table 3: Category Two: Collaboration

Clusters		
Collaboration with Colleagues	Parental Considerations	Student Collaboration
Mentoring	Parental Support	Classroom Community
IEP Teams	Challenges with Parents	Peer Tutoring
Teacher Assistant Support		Students as Experts

*Cluster one: Collaboration with colleagues.*

Throughout the interviews, participants described how they collaborated with other teachers to best meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classes. The new teachers spoke of the importance of learning from other teachers with experience, collaborating with IEP teams for students with special needs, and collaborating with teacher assistants assigned to their students. This cluster is comprised of the following themes: (a) Mentoring, (b) IEP Teams, and (c) Teacher Assistant Support.

*Mentoring.* Participants discussed their lack of experience in meeting their students' diverse needs and explained how they learned from others with experience. "It seems like a challenge to help students with special needs [when] I don't have that knowledge yet. Where can I get it (Trisha)?" This would then result in participants seeking out mentorship opportunities. Trisha described a mentoring situation.

It was just trial and error, what worked, what didn't work, talking to the other teachers. I have got so and so and this is what is happening and they would try

and give me some suggestions of what they knew. And so it was me trying that, and also learning about how my personality worked with a particular strategy would be different than the strategy with the teacher that had given me the advice.

Ruby explained that most of her learning occurred through collaboration with other teachers. "I learned more from other teachers and the teaching profession than from my classes." Participants stressed the importance of having someone available to answer their questions. "I went back and talked to my practicum teacher and asked him for help because I didn't know how to do a number of things" (Catherine).

Amy described how a more formalized mentoring program helped her meet her students' needs.

[Name of district] has a mentorship program that I found very helpful. . . . you get to choose a mentor . . . that was really good for me for finding out about protocol and about how to do things and how to deal with parents and how to write your IEPs and just everything, any kind of questions and it allows you to have an open door with that person and it also gave you some TOC [teacher-on-call] time throughout the year where you guys can get together and share notes and learn about different things.

*My reflection: The biggest help for me so far this year has been talking to other teachers in my position. There is no formal mentoring program in my district; however, networking with others in my position has been an absolute lifesaver for me! It gives me the confidence that the answer to any question I have (regardless of how silly it may seem) is only a phone call or an email away. Just knowing that I have someone to turn to for help gives me confidence in a job that has unexpected turns all the time. I would recommend to all school districts to*

*formalize a mentoring program to ensure all new teachers have ongoing communications with an experienced teacher in a similar position.*

It would be important to investigate research on mentoring relationships and their benefits to new teachers. As well as learning from others with experience, participants also spoke of how they collaborated with members of Individual Education Plan Teams.

*IEP Teams.* Participants shared the value of collaboration with members of a child's IEP team. Trisha spoke of a First Nations student who was struggling and explained how she collaborated with members of this student's team to create a program that would meet this student's needs. "It was the First Nations teacher, the other teachers in humanities, and the counselor as well, and we were trying to figure out the best way to help this student."

Participants expressed their satisfaction with collaboration after witnessing students succeed.

It is also successful when you can work together with everybody and everybody comes together and you have your IEP meetings and you get everybody's input and that is really nice when you see those kids starting to work and grow and that sort of thing. (Amy)

Participants shared that collaboration with colleagues was a successful way to meet their students' diverse learning needs; however, in addition to appreciating the value of collaboration, Catherine also expressed a concern about the lack of communication she had with a member of a child's IEP team. "I had an ESL student in the class and I never once met his speech pathologist. I had no communication with her at all. I didn't even know who she was."

*My reflection: I have found IEP meetings and meetings with individuals on IEP teams to be extremely helpful in putting together educational programs for students. It is almost as if team members are puzzle pieces that come together to form the complete picture during these meetings. Each person offers strategies that are informed by their own personal expertise allowing a wide range of*

*knowledge to inform our teaching practice. I also find the IEP document to be an effective way of monitoring students' educational programs. I found it interesting that none of the participants mentioned the IEP document.*

Participants shared the value of IEP teams in meeting the needs of their students.

They also described the collaboration that occurred with the teacher assistants in their classrooms.

*Teacher assistant support.* The new teachers shared how they collaborated with teacher assistants (TAs) that were assigned to work with students with special needs. Participants reported feeling frustrated that not every student with a special need was assigned a teacher assistant; however, for the students that were assigned TAs, participants spoke of how teacher assistants supported their students' learning.

I have a Grade three student who is reading at a Kindergarten level. He didn't even have all of his letter sounds. I worked with the [teacher] assistant and she has been able to give him individual reading practice daily and now he is reading at a mid Grade one level. (Ruby)

Participants also shared how they collaborated with the teacher assistants to support students' behavioural challenges. Ruby described how the teacher assistant assigned to one of her students would take her student for a walk or calm them down until they were ready to join the classroom again. Laura detailed a similar situation.

I had a TA who was untrained and [she] was there to assist me in any way that she could . . . you could usually see if the kids were starting to get agitated and you would just have the TA sit with them or work with them and help whenever they needed or if I needed somebody to take them out of the classroom because it was

not safe for the child to be in the classroom she would take the child out of the classroom.

While Catherine found the TA in her class to be supportive, she also felt at a loss regarding how to use the TA effectively. She wanted guidance on how to set up a more effective program. "I would like to learn how to set up a program with the assistants to figure out how we can help the kids more."

The new teachers reflected on their collaboration with their colleagues through mentoring, IEP teams, and with teacher assistants. In addition to their colleagues, participants shared how they collaborated with parents.

*Cluster two: Parental considerations.*

Throughout their interviews, participants described the importance of collaborating with the parents. Participants spoke of both the support and encouragement parents offered, as well as some challenges they faced with parents. This cluster contains two themes: (a) Parental Support and (b) Challenges with Parents.

*Parental support.* Participants reported that collaboration with parents was an effective way to learn about their students' needs and support their students' educational programs. Ruby shared how she collaborated with a parent to set up consistent behaviour expectations between home and school for one student in her class who had extreme behaviour challenges. Ruby met with the parent and principal and it was decided that this child's parent would come into class to show support for Ruby and her classroom expectations. Ruby noted that the student showed an increase in acceptable behaviours due to the consistency of expectations at home and school.

Participants mentioned the support that was given at home for a child's program. Trisha described how she communicated with a parent through a student's agenda so the parent was aware of what was happening at school and could support the student's learning at home.

In terms of the ADHD student, the hyper one, after we figured out a system and he had been on medication it was easier because he knew what would need to happen. I would write more in his agenda and his mom would help out at home.

Participants also shared how they collaborated with parents through regular phone conversations. Trisha described the benefits of her frequent telephone communication in fostering relationships with parents.

A lot of parents were also very supportive if you gave them a call and said this is what is happening, or you kind of touch base and you let them come in as much as they can to help you out and ask you what's going on, what they can do at home. That worked very well for a lot of the students too. (Trisha)

*My reflection: A very helpful piece of advice I remember learning from teacher training was that parents are often the experts on their children. I remember feeling very overwhelmed by a designation that a child in my school had received. I felt like I didn't know where to start in my search for information about this child's unique needs. I had a discussion with the child's parent and she explained how she started her search for information and gave me helpful pointers on how to find the information I was looking for. Each time either of us learned something relevant to this child's condition, we would share what we had learned with each other.*

Participants discussed how parental support varied with each student. Amy noted that some parents showed a great deal of support, whereas others posed many challenges. "The

support level and the ideas of every parent are different and some parents have lots of support for teachers and education and some don't at all."

*Challenges with parents.* Participants experienced both support and challenges from parents. When asked to describe some of the challenges in their inclusive classrooms, participants often described challenges with parents. Catherine explained her struggles facilitating parental involvement in their child's education.

I found that I didn't know how to get parents involved . . . I just didn't know how to get them more involved in the education of their kids, that was challenging. I think that will come with more experience but also you know, these parents just have the mindset that I think is normal, that it is the teacher's job and then the kids just come home with homework, but I would like to get parents more actively involved.

Harry commented on the lack of parental support for some of his students due to parent's own issues and concerns, such as suspected alcohol abuse. One of his biggest challenges was "parents that don't know how to be parents. . . . They have the best intentions in mind, but they do not follow through with them."

While participants perceived a lack of parental support as a challenge, they also described challenges with parents having what they new teachers perceived as unrealistic expectations. Amy discussed the challenges in helping parents develop realistic expectations about their child's abilities.

I mean some parents want you to promise them the world as a teacher and you want as a teacher to give them that piece of mind that their child will be taken care of and you do take care of them and help them out as much as you can, but at the

same time, you need to make sure that everybody has a realistic view of everything and of what those capabilities are of the particular students and the ideologies of inclusion and that sort of the thing and how it works and how it doesn't work.

The new teachers felt parents' unrealistic expectations were roadblocks in creating educational plans for students. Amy explained how parents' unrealistic views created goals that were not in line with her own goals for students. "One of the challenges is trying to please everybody as a teacher and help everybody to know you are trying and you [and the parents] are all working together with the same goal of having the student succeed in the class."

Participants described the support and challenges they experienced with parents. They also described how they collaborated with another vital stakeholder in education: their students.

*Cluster three: Student collaboration.*

During interviews, participants described how they collaborated with the students in their classrooms to meet students' unique needs. Participants described three types of collaboration that occurred with their students. The new teachers worked to create a sense of community in their classrooms which fostered collaboration between the teachers and their classes. Through this sense of community that was created in their classrooms, the new teachers encouraged students to collaborate and learn from each other in the form of peer tutoring. The new teachers also described how individual students were often a valuable source of information about their own needs. The following themes describe the types of student collaboration in the inclusive classrooms: (a) Classroom Community, (b) Peer Tutoring, and (c) Students as Experts.

*Classroom community.* Participants described how they encouraged the students to create a community of learners in their classrooms with students and the teacher learning together about learning and teaching practices. The collaboration that occurred within each of the participant's

classrooms led to improvements in individual as well as whole class behaviours. Catherine explained how she created a sense of community in her classroom.

I really emphasized that when they were loud or obnoxious during sit down work, that I took the focus off myself and made it that they were disrupting their classmates and that certain kids needed certain learning environments to understand stuff.

Trisha spoke of a situation in which she learned with her whole class how to best meet the needs of one of her students.

I had one student who needed social skills, he didn't know when his behaviours were irritating other students, even when they said that to him. . . . So he learned, we learned together as a class and him himself practicing different things in the classroom what worked.

Participants shared the value in creating a sense of community in their classrooms. The new teachers described how their students developed helping and caring behaviours through a sense of community in the classroom. Ruby stated that "at first it was hard because the kids didn't know each other. But now they help each other and care about each other." Harry explains that "if somebody has been hurt, they flock around that kid to help them. They are really compassionate, the students."

Participants perceived that one of the benefits of having a sense of community in the class was the willingness of the students to engage in peer tutoring.

*Peer tutoring.* Participants spoke of the difficulties they had in meeting the diverse needs of students in their inclusive classrooms. The communities that were created in the participants' classrooms enabled teachers to rely on students to provide extra instruction and guidance during

classroom activities through peer tutoring. Many teachers used peer tutoring as a way to ensure all students received the instruction they needed, regardless of ability level. Julie commented on how she alternated between partners of similar ability levels so that “they get that extra challenge from each other,” with partners of different ability levels able to “coach and teach each other.” Catherine used group work to facilitate peer tutoring among her students.

I did a lot of group work because I had some very high achieving Grade sevens who I would split up and put in these groups so I could reduce my explanations so what turned into what I thought should be done, is me doing instruction and kids working, was actually a class where the kids had to work together.

Laura also used grouping to allow her students to help each other to access the curriculum. She worked with other teachers at her school to create multi-age units and grouped older students with more skills with younger students or students with learning disabilities. Laura commented on how successful this grouping was. “The older kids with more skills and not as many learning disabilities were able to help the other kids who had a harder time with those things.”

Trisha encouraged students to ask each other for help because she knew she could not help all of the students who needed extra assistance; “if you don’t get it then maybe ask your table partner.” Trisha also collaborated with a higher achieving student in her class to assist a student who was struggling.

I was really lucky because I had a nice student and she was very motherly with [the struggling student] and that worked really well. The helper student was a strong student academically and socially and so she would try to help him, like ‘okay, we are doing this math question right now, and what do you need to get

out' and kind of prompting him, instead of saying 'get this out, get this out,' but 'what do you need to get out when this happens' just trying to keep him on track as I was helping other students.

Participants described how peer tutoring was effective in meeting the needs of the struggling students in their classrooms. It would be important to consider how peer tutoring impacts on the higher achieving students in inclusive classrooms.

*Students as experts.* Regardless of the age of their students, participants explained how they collaborated with their students to learn how to best meet their students' individual needs. Often, the students were aware of their own needs and abilities and were able to work with their teachers to create effective learning strategies. With her primary students, Lisa explained how some of her students would recognize when they were getting agitated and frustrated and they would realize that they needed a break from their studies. Trisha described a similar situation with her Grade 8 students.

The one that was the most severe, he had a behaviour problem and if he knew when he was getting angry and it was soon out of control then he would just say 'I need to go for a walk to see the counselor' and he would go and then come back and he would let me know so he had a way out of doing that.

Amy discussed how she gave her students structured questions to allow them to recognize their own needs. "What could you do within the classroom that could decrease your anxiety or help you out in the situation and then if that doesn't work then you can go [to the resource room]." Trisha explained how one of her students learned how to self-regulate to manage his behaviour in her classroom. "He was more able to pick up cues of what kinds of

things about other students bothered him . . . he learned about himself and how to deal with other students.”

Other teachers noted how students would understand their own needs and communicate their needs to their teachers. Trisha collaborated with one of her students to determine the best strategies to help him succeed in her classroom.

I had one student who was albino, and he needed to have things photocopied really, really huge for him and he was very good in the sense that he could give me ideas of what helped him, like he knew and so that helped a lot with the older students or the more mature students as well, that they knew what worked.

*My reflection: I worked with a student with learning disabilities and we worked on writing using technology that helped her to increase her amount of written output. Every time she came to see me, we would sit at the same spot in the center of my room. She was often distracted and I would have to constantly give her prompts to focus on her work. One day she came in and moved the table right in the front of the room facing a blank wall. I asked her why she had done this and she explained 'You see I get very distracted and this way nothing can distract me!'*

Due to the diverse needs in inclusive classrooms, participants collaborated with colleagues, parents, and their students. This collaboration was beneficial in supporting the range of learning needs in the inclusive classrooms and provided the new teachers with strategies to address curriculum considerations.

### *Category Three: Curriculum*

Participants shared their knowledge of the Ministry prescribed learning outcomes; however, they explained that in order to address the social and behavioural needs of their students, they also followed an alternative curriculum. This alternative curriculum focused on

social skills and behaviour management. When the new teachers did follow the prescribed curriculum, they made adaptations to their instruction and assessment in order for their students to reach these outcomes. This category is made up of two clusters: (a) Alternative Curriculum and (b) Adaptations. The themes that structure each cluster are illustrated in Table 4. Participant quotations will be used to enhance the meaning of each theme.

Table 4: Category Three: Curriculum

Clusters	
Alternative Curriculum	Adaptations
Social Needs	Individualized Instruction
Behavioural Considerations	Alternative Assessment
	Challenges With Adaptations

*Cluster one: Alternative curriculum*

Despite having a prescribed curriculum with a primary focus on academic learning outcomes, participants described how they followed an alternative curriculum that centered on social and behavioural goals. The new teachers justified this alternative curriculum based on the social and behavioural needs of their students. This alternative focus often overshadowed the prescribed academic curriculum. This cluster contains two themes: (a) Social Needs and (b) Behavioural Considerations.

*Social needs.* Due to the social needs of students in their classrooms, participants described how they focused on developing social skills for students. The new teachers perceived that developing appropriate social skills was more of a priority than achieving academic goals.

I found a lot of times during the day were more focused on the emotional issues and how to behave in the classroom like social skills, rather than academic. I found that it was hard to fit in the academic stuff when there was so much social skills that needed to be built . . . I felt I did the best that I could under the conditions that I had and that I was able to provide quite a bit of social skills and training that way. I feel that my academic things may have suffered somewhat. (Laura).

With such a focus on developing appropriate social skills, participants described how the social needs of individual students informed their instruction. Amy outlined how she created diverse assignments on the same topic to address the range of ability of her students while also ensuring the students felt like they were part of the class. “We try to keep [the struggling students] doing work that is similar to the rest of the kids in the class so that they feel they are a part of everything.”

Consistent with their focus on social needs in their classrooms, participants described either social or behavioural accomplishments that were achieved in their classrooms; only one participant mentioned an academic achievement. “The accomplishments were more social than academic . . . we worked really hard as a group to become a group” (Catherine). Laura added “by the end of the year I had huge improvements in my classroom with the social skills and being able to just get along as a class.”

As well as focusing on students’ social needs, participants also described behavioural considerations that comprised part of their alternative curriculum.

*Behavioural considerations.* Throughout their interviews, the new teachers shared their experiences with behaviour management in their inclusive classrooms. Participants described

that the most intense focus on behaviour concerns was during the first part of the school year; however, behavioural considerations were present over the course of the year. Harry described a particularly overwhelming situation during the first few weeks of school.

There was myself, a trained TA, and a parent in the classroom. My teaching partner looked over from her classroom and felt sorry for us. She felt that we were being overwhelmed by the situation in the classroom. I had a student under my desk, I had two others fighting.

Catherine also reported struggling with behavioural concerns during the first part of the year. "A typical day, well especially in the beginning, a typical day was focused on on-task behaviour and discipline." Ruby added "it took two to three weeks because of having so many behavior problems until we had settled into routines. I had to deal with two students throwing things and leaving the room."

In addition to the intense behaviour concerns at the beginning of the year, the participants shared how their ongoing behaviour concerns overshadowed the prescribed curriculum. Harry stated:

You still want to try and achieve your school goals . . . so we really focus on that as much as we can, but at the same time, I really can't think of a day yet where there hasn't been, not necessarily a crisis, but something where one of us is pulled away to deal with a student. I have also been called names, told to F off, although you don't always understand because they need speech language pathology."

Trisha described how having a student with ADHD in her classroom would shift her focus from the academic curriculum to managing this student's behaviour.

I had one year a student who was ADHD and he was the very hyper, inattentive type and he would come in in the morning and let me know that ‘I forgot to take my medicine in the morning but I took it right before I came in’ or that he completely forgot and it was just ‘okay we’ll try to get through the day’ (Trisha).

The new teachers also had to come up with individualized behaviour management strategies to address the diverse behaviours in their classrooms. The new teachers explained how students responded differently to various classroom management strategies. Laura shared her reality of diverse classroom management strategies:

You had to make sure that those kids with behavioural problems weren’t disrupting and interfering with the other children’s learning as well so you had to come up with different behavioural strategies and it was different for every child as well, so something that worked very well for one child didn’t work well for someone else so you had to make sure you had plans in place for all the children.

Participants discussed safety concerns related to the behavioural considerations in their classrooms. Laura expressed her concern about making sure her students were safe at all times. “Behaviour was really, really challenging, just because you wanted to make sure your kids were safe in the classroom and it was sometimes very difficult to do that.” The new teachers remarked how sometimes student impulsivity created safety risk. For example, Harry described a situation in which a primary student was on the stage in the gym wrapped in a curtain and he fell off the stage, but Harry was able to catch him.

*My reflection: It was interesting to hear participants describe the alternative curriculum they focused on. As a non-enrolling teacher, I work primarily with students one-on-one; therefore, social and behavioural concerns are not as evident as they would be in a classroom. It surprised me that so much class time*

*was spent focusing on 'non-academic' considerations. After reflecting on the interviews; however, I realized that by addressing social skills and classroom management with their students, the new teachers were promoting growth and successes in their students that enabled increased opportunities for academic learning in the future.*

The social and behavioural concerns that were present in the participant's classrooms led to an alternative curriculum that included social skills and behaviour management. In addition to this alternative curriculum, participants described how they adapted the prescribed academic curriculum to meet their students' diverse needs.

*Cluster two: Adaptations.*

In order to accommodate their students' diverse needs, participants perceived the need to adapt the curriculum. The new teachers described how they adapted their instruction and assessment to enable their designated and struggling students to meet prescribed learning outcomes. The new teachers reported being restricted by time and their knowledge to successfully adapt the curriculum according to each student's needs. The themes that comprise this cluster are (a) Individualized Instruction, (b) Alternative Assessments, and (c) Challenges with Adapting the Curriculum.

*Individualized instruction.* Participants shared how they created individualized instruction for their students with unique learning needs. The new teachers planned their individualized instruction *before* the lessons, focused on individual students *during* instruction, and gave individualized instruction *after* whole class instruction. Amy described how she took her students' needs into consideration in her lesson planning:

When I plan my lessons I make sure that I am thinking about all of my students so that the kids that I have with learning disabilities and the kids who are on adapted

programs I need to make their work a little bit different but still kind of following along with the rest of the class maybe according to what adaptations they need. I have to take that into consideration as well as the modified kids.

Julie reported similar preparation for her lessons. "It is a variety of instruction and ways of instructing . . . I don't approach every lesson exactly the same way everyday because you can't due to the dynamics of the variety of kids in your class." She also described how she focused on individual students during instruction.

The biggest struggle I would find during [calendar time] is having the ones at the low end of the spectrum engaged at all times. There is a constant effort on my part to make sure they are paying attention whether it is verbally or giving them visual cues to stay with the group.

Participants also discussed how they gave individual instruction to their struggling students after giving instruction to the whole class. "I basically would spend time doing a lesson and then having to go through and repeat it individually because the kids just wouldn't get it the first time from me" (Catherine). Julie explained that after she gave instruction to the class she would individually help the students she knew needed extra help. Participants knew the students that needed the extra help and these students would be the focus of additional instruction.

For the students who needed the extra support, so this is the academic support, I would kind of wander more often to their area and see how they were doing and give them more prompts to see how things were going, asking them 'are things going on well?' After learning about them and learning that that wasn't enough to ask them because if you ask them how they are doing they would just say 'I'm

doing fine' and obviously when you look at what they actually did it is not fine (Trisha).

As well as providing individualized instruction, participants also shared how they provided alternative forms of assessment to meet the needs of the students in their inclusive classrooms.

*Alternative assessment.* Participants explained their role of assessing the educational programs of the students in their classrooms. The new teachers described the alternative assessments they created for struggling students. Catherine explained how a struggling student did not want to write anything in her class because he had not been successful in previous school years. "He went from a kid who wouldn't write anything to a kid that would hand in a whole page of writing because I told him I didn't care about spelling because he could not spell at all. I learned [Bob] writing."

Trisha described her flexibility with assessment based on her students' abilities.

It was different strategies for assessing writing, some of them could rewrite up to the point that it was report card time. . . . I think on their academic ability also could be that they may have slightly different outcomes like maybe they wouldn't have to write an essay, they could just give me an outline form. . . . Depending on the student it would be the spelling issue, or you don't have to do the written, you could do the oral so come in after school we'll just do it and that worked really well for a couple of the students.

Participants expressed the difficulty in providing alternative assessments for the diverse range of students in their classes. Amy commented on the difficulty with having alternative assessments for so many students in her class.

I think with the assessment part gets a little difficult especially with something like Language Arts where everybody is at different levels. It can get a little bit time consuming as a teacher because you are setting up every assignment with adaptations and then you are figuring out how to mark those accordingly so you can make it so the kids with learning difficulties can be successful at it. You don't want it to be too hard for them and you still don't want to make it too easy for them. You want to make it at a level that is challenging for them. Having 11 kids that are designated that we work with can be cumbersome because every kid has a specific need. So you are not just creating one assignment, you are doing it a whole bunch of different times in different ways and then you are trying to mark it being fair and getting a good picture of it.

It should be noted that participants did not focus their discussions on modified educational programs, instead they focused only on adapted programs. Further research should investigate teachers' abilities and comfort levels regarding adapted versus modified educational programs.

*Challenges with adapting the curriculum.* All participants shared their frustrations about meeting each student's needs through an adapted curriculum. Frustrations stemmed from participants' lack of experience and knowledge about how to adapt the curriculum and from the number of adaptations they made for students in their inclusive classrooms. Laura reflected on the quality of her adapted instruction during her first year of teaching by stating, "I felt that I did the best that I could. Being a first year teacher, it was quite challenging." Catherine expressed her frustrations about her lack of knowledge and experience in adapting the curriculum.

I don't feel like I did enough for the students. . . . I mean being that I was a new teacher of course, I had a lot of challenges just figuring it out for myself. But I don't feel like I had the resources or the knowledge to give those kids as much as they needed.

Trisha shared similar frustrations about her lack of knowledge and experience.

I wish I had more of like a handbook of knowing these are things to try if you've got this kind of thing. I think a lot of that had to do with experience. I didn't have that, I didn't have the knowledge of what to pull out could work.

As well as their lack of knowledge and experience, participants also discussed their frustrations with the amount of adaptations that were required to address the diverse needs in their classrooms. "Every single child is so individual and has different needs and different things that are challenging for them and different things they need to work on" (Laura). Amy was frustrated with the amount of adaptations she had to make to her assignments along with the adaptations to the assessment that went with it. "I am aware of the adaptations required for each student and I have the best intentions, but there is not enough time." Laura expressed similar frustrations about the quantity of adaptations that needed to be made to the prescribed curriculum to ensure meet her students' learning needs.

It was very challenging because you had to have different learning outcomes for many of the children and so you had to have a lot planned before hand so that way all children were able to be doing something during the day and learning and feeling successful so it was quite challenging to find different ways to make sure that all kids were [pause] it was just very challenging to make sure because all the children had different needs that needed to be met.

*My reflection: As the case manager for the students with IEPs, I found it very difficult to ensure that all adaptations recorded on the IEPs were followed through on a regular basis. Some students had so many adaptations and/or modifications that when I did IEP reviews during the year, it became clear that not all adapted or modified strategies were being followed.*

Participants shared many positive experiences about their teaching, but there were also some frustrations and challenges. Due to the diversity of students in their inclusive classrooms, participants relied on collaboration with colleagues, parents, and students to meet curricular outcomes, including an alternative curriculum that resulted from the social and behavioural needs of the students in their classrooms. Based on their experiences in their inclusive classrooms, participants had several recommendations to offer.

#### *Recommendations*

After describing their experiences in inclusive classrooms, participants were asked to give recommendations for teacher training institutions and to school boards. Consistent with the themes emerging from the data, the recommendations suggest a need for better training and support for new teachers so they are better able to manage the diverse needs in their classrooms. The author has included all related recommendations in the following concise listing:

1. To require longer practicums during teacher training to gain more supervised experience in classrooms.
2. To require more experience working with children with a diverse range of abilities (either in volunteer or paid work experiences) prior to entering teacher training programs.
3. To include in special education coursework the process of creating IEPs as well as referring to the IEP document on a continuous basis to inform student instruction and

assessment. Also to include information specific to disabilities and the knowledge of where to look for more information.

4. To include coursework on classroom management strategies for a diverse range of students as part of teacher training.
5. To encourage practicing teachers with diverse experiences to talk to preservice teachers about the realities of inclusion.
6. To encourage teacher assistants and paraprofessionals to talk to preservice teachers about their roles and relationships with classroom teachers.
7. To include in methods courses examples of adaptations to instruction and lesson plans with a focus on diverse learners.
8. To include examples of alternative assessments in assessment coursework.
9. For school boards to create a mentorship program for new teachers.

### *Summary*

Chapter four has provided a discussion of the results. A profile of participants was given, followed by a description of the essential structure of the experience of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Following, categories, clusters, and themes that emerged from the data were presented. Finally, recommendations that stemmed from participants' experiences were provided.

Chapter five will describe the findings as they relate to the extant literature. Limitations of the current study will be presented. Following, implications for preservice teachers, new teachers, teacher training institutions, and school boards, as well as directions for future research will be discussed.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

Chapter five consists of four sections. The first section will give a summary of the results of the study. The findings are discussed in relation to the goals of the study as outlined in the introduction; specific findings are discussed in the context of related literature. The limitations of this study will be described in the second part of this chapter. The third part of this chapter will outline the implications of the present study. This chapter will conclude with directions for future research.

### *Research Contributions*

Current research describes the need for special education training for preservice teachers (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, 1999; BC Ministry of Education, 1997; BC Ministry of Education, 2000; Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Cook, 2002; Davern, 1999; Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Naylor, 2002; Naylor, 2004; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995) and recommends using new teachers as informants (Brownell et al., 2005; Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Whitaker, 2003). Through an examination of the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms, this study offers new contributions to the field. Results are discussed in the context of current literature where it exists.

*Purpose One: Gain an understanding of the lived experiences of new teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms*

Participants described many successes and challenges in their role as a new teacher in an inclusive classroom. Due to the student diversity, the participants collaborated with colleagues, parents, and students in order to create adaptations to instruction and assessment. Participants focused on an alternative curriculum that included social and behavioural considerations that

often overshadowed the academic curriculum. Results are discussed in the following sections:

(a) Student Diversity, (b) Collaboration, and (c) Curriculum.

### *Student Diversity*

The diversity that was described in each of the interviews is consistent with findings of current research (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2004; BC Ministry of Education, 1997; BC Ministry of Education, Skills, and Training, 1997). Alberta's Commission on Learning (2004) states that "today's classrooms, in Alberta and across the country, include children who are gifted or who have special talents, children who have mild and moderate disabilities and those who are severely disabled" (Success for every child, ¶ 2).

Included in today's inclusive classrooms are students who are struggling to meet curriculum expectations. Participants reflected on the disproportionate amount of time they dedicated to the struggling students in their classrooms. Participants shared how they did not feel they were meeting the needs of the higher achieving students in their inclusive classrooms. Current research focuses on schools not meeting the needs of gifted learners (Hughes, 1999; Renzulli & Park, 2000; Robertson, 1991). In an action research study, Hughes (1999) outlined her concerns with the disproportionate quantity of services struggling students received and focused her research on how to best meet the needs of gifted students in her diverse classroom. She used surveys and interviews of students and parents to investigate how to meet the needs of her gifted students. She found that using a combination of strategies, including a balance between enrichment and acceleration, flexible grouping of students, and allowing students some autonomy in academic decision making, were perceived as effective in meeting these students' needs. Robertson (1991) found that one of the contributing factors for gifted students dropping out of high school was that teachers were not meeting these students' learning needs. The

concern about not meeting the needs of their higher achieving students indicated by the group of new teachers interviewed in this study requires further investigation to determine the consistency of this concern across the province.

The disproportionate time participants noted that they spent addressing the needs of individual student's is inconsistent with both the BC Ministry of Education goal to support the development of all students (BC Ministry of Education, 2001) and with the BC School Act of 1996, which states that it is a teacher's responsibility to design, supervise, and assess individual educational programs for *all* students (BC Ministry of Education, 1996). This lack of consistency between goals and practice is a concern as not all students' needs are being met in our inclusive classrooms. One participant suggested that having fewer students with special needs in their classroom may have allowed her to address the needs of all students in her classroom. This concern is addressed in the recent amendments to Bill 33 (2006):

A board must ensure that any class in any school in its school district does not have more than 3 students with an individual education plan unless (a) in the opinions of the superintendent of schools for the school district and the principal of the school, the organization of the class is appropriate for student learning, and (b) the principal of the school has consulted with the teacher of that class. (76.1 (2.3))

As Bill 33 becomes a reality in upcoming years, this may allow teachers to distribute their time more evenly in their classrooms. Future research should investigate the effects of Bill 33 on teachers' abilities to meet the needs of the range of students in their inclusive classrooms.

Another addition to the diversity in participants' classrooms was the students in the grey area. The BC Ministry of Education (1997) defines these students as those "who are not

succeeding in school. . . . They don't fit traditional labels; they do not meet criteria for special education funding" (p. 2). As indicated by the definition, these students do not meet criteria for a designation. Participants expressed their frustrations about recognizing students who were struggling, but not being able to provide them with the necessary support due to a lack of service that would have come from a formal designation or due to other more obvious student needs in their classrooms. Sparks, Myrtle, and Fewster (2006) report that 20% of students in BC are considered to be in the grey area. They state that 90% of classroom teachers feel frustrated at their lack of ability to support these students. This is consistent with the concerns voiced by the new teachers. The authors recommend increased support through hiring more Learning Assistance teachers and decreased class size limits. The new teachers interviewed in this study shared their strategies for coping with such diversity: collaboration with colleagues, parents, and students.

### *Collaboration*

Due to the diversity in the participants' classrooms, the new teachers shared how they collaborated with colleagues, parents, and students to inform their teaching practices. The need for this collaboration is stated by the BC Ministry of Education:

A classroom teacher cannot meet all the learning needs of every pupil who comes through the door. . . . Seeking assistance from others is something all professionals find necessary from time to time. The following are possible human resources for classroom teachers: school based teams, school district personnel, parents, and members of the community with an interest in children and youth.

(2004, You can't do it alone, ¶ 1)

Participants collaborated with colleagues through IEP teams and the teacher assistants assigned to their students with special needs. The new teachers shared how they created individual goals and strategies to achieve these goals by working with other professionals who were familiar with their students. Collaboration with IEP teams was seen as a source of information for new teachers; however, there was no mention of using the IEP document to inform and evaluate students' educational programs. Further research should investigate how these documents are currently being used in a child's educational program.

The new teachers reflected how they learned from other teachers with experience through a mentoring relationship. Extant literature describes the powerful role that mentoring can provide to teachers (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Glazer, 2006; Smith, 2005). Achinstein and Barrett (2004) explain that "mentors offer novices a repertoire of frames to diagnose problems and develop alternative approaches to meet the needs of diverse students" (p. 717).

As well as collaborating with colleagues at school, participants described both their successes and challenges as they collaborated with parents. When parents did show support for the teachers, both parties could collaborate and work together to meet the child's needs. Participants commented on the difficulties they had in planning a child's program when the parents did not have realistic goals for their child. One participant wanted to find ways to encourage some parents to become involved in their child's education. This concern is echoed in the literature (Mandel, 2006; Wurst, 2005). Wurst (2005) argues that many teachers do not know how to get parents involved in their child's education. Wurst suggests that teachers should invite parents into their classrooms and include parents in activities that are happening in the classroom. With parents observing what is happening in the classroom, this may allow parents to

gain a realistic perspective of their child's abilities and may lead to parents and the teacher having similar ideas of what the child's abilities are.

To meet the needs of their students, participants also shared how they collaborated with the students themselves. Participants described how they created a sense of community within their classrooms in which the students together with the teacher learned about effective ways to carry out instruction. This creation of a sense of community also addressed some of the social concerns facing students in inclusive classrooms. The new teachers shared how by allowing the students to appreciate the diversity of learning techniques and strategies being used in their classrooms, students learned to act in a respectful manner.

The participants shared how they grouped students in their classrooms to act as peer tutors for students who were struggling. Through strategic grouping with higher achieving students helping those students who were struggling, participants found a way to ensure all students could be successful. Ezell, Kohler, and Strain (1994) demonstrated that when struggling students were paired with peer tutors not only did their scores on a test improve, but also the amount of time they were actively engaged in instruction during peer tutoring was nearly two times that of the time they were engaged during whole class instruction. Both tutors and tutees reported high levels of satisfaction when engaged in peer tutoring. This research indicates the social benefits of peer tutoring for both groups and the academic benefits for the tutees; however, it does not address the academic benefits for the mentors, or higher achieving students. Having spent their classroom time assisting those that are struggling, are they missing opportunities to challenge their own learning? Using peer tutoring in the classroom coupled with the focus the teachers spent with the struggling students does not leave much opportunity for the higher achieving students in these classrooms to focus on their own learning. Future research should

investigate ways to include increased opportunities for gifted and higher achieving students in our inclusive classrooms.

Participants also described how their students were experts about their own learning and needs. Although the idea of listening to students to inform ideas about educational policy is echoed throughout the literature (Cook-Sather, 2002; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Lincoln, 1995; Poplin & Weeres, 1993; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001) only recently, has there been research stating the need to include students to inform instruction (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cook-Sather, 2003). Cook-Sather (2003) states, "if we listen to the voices of our students to get the human dimension on how our practices . . . affect people we can begin to make different decisions about how to . . . support students' learning and learning differences" (2003, p. 26). Through collaboration with their students, the new teachers were able to better understand and meet the learning needs of the students in their inclusive classrooms. Future research should examine the factors that influence students' abilities to determine their own learning needs in an inclusive classroom.

Participants shared how they collaborated with colleagues, parents, and students to determine effective strategies to meet students' needs. These strategies included adapted instruction and assessment to the prescribed academic curriculum. The academic curriculum was often overshadowed by the social and behavioural needs of students in the inclusive classrooms.

### *Curriculum*

The new teachers described an alternative curriculum that they followed to meet the social and behavioral needs of the students in their inclusive classrooms. They perceived that these social and behavioural considerations often overshadowed the academic curriculum. The participants reflected how they spent much of their instructional time engaged in classroom

management. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) state that one of the biggest concerns new teachers report is classroom management. They argue that this is the result of one of two reasons. First, the authors argue that new teachers experience “practice shock” as they move from their ideals about teaching into the reality of the classroom (p. 717). A second reason that Achinstein and Barrett (2004) propose for the focus on behaviour concerns is that most often, new teachers are placed in the most challenging teaching positions, including low socio-economic areas with high-risk students. They argue that new teachers often are faced with students that exhibit more extreme behaviours than more experienced teachers. As well as sharing their concerns about the behaviours in their inclusive classrooms, the participants also described that one of their biggest successes was the improvement in behaviour over the course of the year.

Although the new teachers focused on the social and behavioural concerns in their classrooms, they also described following the prescribed academic curriculum. Due to the diverse student needs, the new teachers explained how they adapted the curriculum to meet their students’ individual needs. The participants described how they gave individualized instruction and alternative assessments. The new teachers also shared their frustrations with curriculum adaptations.

*As stated in Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioural Differences:*

Teaching students with diverse needs has become the norm in most British Columbia classrooms. . . . Effective teaching requires consideration of student differences. . . . Teachers should keep in mind that each student is an individual, and, as such, will respond to instruction in a unique manner. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 7)

The new teachers shared how they planned their lessons with individualized instruction for specific students and spent time after giving instruction to the whole class to give individualized instruction to students who did not understand initial instruction. Extant literature describes the importance of individualizing or differentiating instruction based on individual student need in order for all students to be successful learners (Andrews, 1996; Bender, 2002; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Lindelow, 1983; Smutney, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson, 2000; Tomlinson et al., 1997). The new teachers shared how they planned for individualized instruction before a lesson, gave individual instruction to students during a lesson, and repeated instruction and gave prompts to students after a lesson. Consistent with the experiences of the participants, Tomlinson et al. (1997) discuss important elements of individualized instruction that include keeping individual students' needs in mind when planning a lesson, varying type of instruction dependent upon the needs of a learner during a lesson, and continuously assessing student understanding after a lesson to determine what further instruction is necessary.

As well as individualized instruction, Tomlinson (2000) describes the tight relationship between instruction and assessment. This link between adapted instruction and alternative assessments was clear as the participants shared their strategies for ensuring student success. Within the learning outcomes for each of their classes, the new teachers shared how they were flexible in assessing students based on each student's abilities. In order to promote student success, participants shared their flexible assessments they used for a range of students in their classrooms.

Due to the variety of needs in their classrooms, participants expressed frustration at the amount of adaptations they had to make to meet their students' needs. This feeling of frustration is consistent with current research (Mercier, 2003; Sully, 2003). In a case study of a middle

school in BC by Mercier (2003), it was concluded by the school that participated that teachers felt stressed about not being able to meet the learning needs of the students in their classrooms.

Based on their experiences, the participants shared the knowledge and experiences they believe that new teachers need in today's inclusive classrooms.

*Purpose Two: Raise an awareness of some of the knowledge and experiences new teachers need in inclusive classrooms*

Throughout the interviews, the participants were clear about some of the knowledge and experiences they needed while working in their inclusive classrooms. Results will be discussed under the following headings: (a) Knowledge and (b) Experiences.

#### *Knowledge*

Participants discussed how their background knowledge helped them and they shared what knowledge they wished they had before entering their inclusive classrooms. Participants expressed their confidence with planning lessons and units. They felt comfortable creating a general lesson to reach the middle level achievers in their class; however, the new teachers would have liked additional strategies for adapting their lessons for the range of students in their classrooms. Along with strategies for adapting instruction, the new teachers would have liked more of a focus on alternative assessments for struggling students. The new teachers reflected how they were able to be flexible and creative in creating these alternative assessments; however, they struggled with comparing these alternative assessments with the assessments of other students in the class. The balance between ensuring student success and accurately reporting on a student's abilities was difficult for the new teachers. Mandel (2006) reports on the results of informal questions he posed to new teachers and their mentors. Mandel found that one of the areas of most concern to new teachers was assessing their students fairly.

Participants stated the need to be more familiar with the IEP process. Although most often classroom teachers are not in charge of writing the IEPs, they do play an integral role on the IEP team and should be aware of how IEPs are constructed and how to follow the recommendations and strategies laid out by the IEP document. Perhaps if new teachers were more familiar with these documents, they would be more apt to use them to guide their instruction and assessment of students with special needs.

As one of the major challenges facing these new teachers was classroom management, new teachers need to have a range of classroom management strategies at hand. Learning about a variety of ways to handle difficult situations in the classroom will help prepare new teachers when a crisis situation arises. As described by Achinstein and Barrett (2004), the “practice shock” (p. 717) of new teachers experiencing the reality of diverse classrooms for the first time can be eased if new teachers have realistic expectations of the realities that will face them in their inclusive classrooms. Gaining the knowledge from practicing teachers about the reality of diversity and behaviours that are present in today’s classrooms may help to ease the shock that new teachers experience as they begin their teaching careers.

While appreciating the variability between students with special needs designations, the participants noted that they wanted more background knowledge on special needs designations. They wanted to know where to be able to find information about a particular disability or designation.

While they did collaborate with the teacher assistants assigned to their special needs students, participants shared how they would have appreciated more of a framework of how to use their support more effectively. Participants recommended hearing from teacher assistants

about their best experiences in supporting students' needs and positive relationships they have had with teachers.

As well as the knowledge participants felt new teachers should have, there are also several experiences that participants felt helped to prepare them and experiences they wished they had had before entering their inclusive classrooms.

### *Experiences*

All participants described how their practicum experiences were the best learning tools for preparing them for their inclusive classrooms. Participants wanted longer practicums as part of their teacher education training and one participant suggested a concurrent seminar course during the practicum to discuss any concerns or experiences they were having with other preservice teachers. Participants wanted more diverse experiences in their practicums. Participants explained the differences between their practicum experiences, many of which were in middle to upper class neighbourhoods with few behaviour concerns, and their first teaching assignment. As stated by Achinstein and Barrett (2004), new teachers are often placed in the most difficult teaching situations and this contrasts with many practicum placements. Along with more diverse practicum experiences, participants wanted practicums that started at the beginning of the school year to observe how routines were established in the inclusive classrooms. Participants stated that this would have helped them to establish rules and expectations and may have resulted in fewer behaviour concerns throughout the year.

Participants expressed that they would have also benefited from experiences shadowing the Learning Assistance Teacher and Integration Support Teacher. This would have given them more of a complete understanding of the roles and responsibilities of their colleagues. This

experience could be extended to shadow or engage in dialogue with other professionals such as Speech and Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists during their practicums.

Stemming from the knowledge and experiences that the new teachers needed in their inclusive classrooms, the participants outlined recommendations for teacher training institutions and school boards.

*Purpose Three: Elicit recommendations from a sampling of new teachers on effective practice of special education training for pre-service teachers*

After sharing their experiences in their inclusive classrooms, participants were asked to provide recommendations to teacher training institutions to prepare future teachers. The recommendations the participants provided focused on the need for knowledge and the need for greater experience.

#### *Knowledge*

With the recognition that additional courses are not a practical addition to teacher training programs, participants explained that the need for knowledge could be addressed in previously existing coursework in the following areas: (a) special education (b) classroom management, (c) curriculum adaptations, and (d) assessment. Participants suggested that teacher training institutions should include in coursework on special education knowledge of the IEP process, and knowledge on how the IEP document can inform instruction and assessment of students with special needs. The new teachers indicated that this course should also include information on a variety of disabilities and an understanding of resources for further information. This could be accomplished in the form of student presentations, resource binders, and guest lecturers.

Included in either specific classroom management courses or related coursework, the new teachers suggested that there should be strategies given that are useful to set up behaviour

expectations and guidelines at the beginning of the year. The new teachers believed it would be helpful if this coursework also included strategies to use with a more diverse student population. This could be accomplished through role playing and inviting practicing teachers to share their experiences with behaviour management.

Participants indicated the need for methods courses in teacher training to include adaptations to instruction and lesson plans. They argued that this would help to prepare preservice teachers for the reality of the diverse learners in today's classrooms. This is consistent with research by Schumm et al. (1995). These authors interviewed general education teachers about their lesson planning for students with disabilities. They found that general education teachers had difficulty making adaptations to their content area lesson plans for their students with learning disabilities. The authors stated the need for teachers to be able to adapt instruction based on individual students' needs.

The new teachers would have appreciated attention to alternative forms of assessment in assessment courses during teacher training. Specifically, they suggested that preservice teachers should be instructed on ways to adapt their assessment to ensure student success while also maintaining a realistic picture of student ability.

### *Experiences*

As well as knowledge, participants recommended that teacher training institutions should ensure that preservice teachers have the following experiences included in their teaching education programs: (a) requirements before entering teaching training programs, (b) structured practicum experiences, and (c) learning from others with experience.

Participants suggested that prior to entrance in teacher training institutions, preservice teachers should have experience working with children and youth, including children and youth

with diverse abilities and needs. To ensure all preservice teachers have this experience, the participants argued that teacher training institutions should require, as part of the entrance requirements into teacher training programs, that preservice teachers have had a specific amount of experience working with children with diverse abilities. The new teachers commented that this could be in the form of volunteer hours or paid work experience.

The new teachers indicated that practicums are an integral part of current teacher education programs; however, with a few adjustments, they shared how they believed preservice teachers will be able to gain a wider perspective into the realities of teaching. The participants recommended that practicums should occur at the beginning of the school year so preservice teachers can observe how teachers set up their classroom's routines and expectations. The new teachers shared how this experience would also allow practicing teachers to model how they get to know the needs of each of their students. As the primary vehicle through which preservice teachers gain an understanding into the everyday experiences and realities of teaching, the new teachers wanted practicums to be at least four months in length to observe student growth and change over the course of at least one term. This would then allow preservice teachers to be involved in assessing and reporting on their students.

Whitaker (2003) states that hearing from others with experience can help to shape realistic views of the experiences of new special education teachers. Consistent with Whitaker, the new teachers believed that another experience that should be included in teacher training programs is the opportunity to learn from others with experience. The new teachers shared that preservice teachers should have the opportunity to listen to a range of practicing teachers with diverse experiences and hear about their successes and challenges. Preservice teachers should

also have the opportunity to learn from support staff such as teacher assistants and other professionals about effective ways to meet students' needs.

A recommendation from the participants that was not related to teacher training institutions was for school boards to create a mentorship program for new teachers. The participants expressed the concern that even if teacher training institutions followed the recommendations, new teachers will always have questions that surface throughout their first years of teaching. A mentorship program would allow new teachers to have a constant resource that would be able to guide them through their beginning experiences in their inclusive classrooms.

#### *Limitations of the Investigation*

Consistent with any research, there were limitations to this study. First, this study was limited to only seven new teachers in British Columbia. Although the participants taught in a range of locations in BC, there are new teachers from areas of BC not represented in this study that may have had different experiences and would therefore have provided different recommendations.

Second, the participants who volunteered to share their experiences may only represent new teachers who felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Perhaps new teachers with more negative experiences may not have felt as comfortable to share their experiences.

Third, this study was limited to new teachers who perceived themselves to be at higher levels of Benner and Judge's (2000) teacher developmental model. There was only one new teacher at the discovery phase of teaching and perhaps teachers at this phase would have had different experiences and provided different recommendations for teacher training institutions. There were also no new teachers at Anderson et al.'s (1995) absolutist orientation end of their

epistemological continuum. New teachers holding the view that there is one right answer for every problem may have provided very different recommendations based on their experiences.

While two out of the seven participants were from minority ethnic groups, there was little variation in age and the majority of participants came from middle class backgrounds. Only one of the participants was male. It would have been beneficial to develop an understanding of the experiences of new teachers with more diverse backgrounds, age, and sex to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Although it is not the author's intent to generalize the results of this study to larger populations, certain findings of the study may reflect the experiences of other new teachers in inclusive classrooms. As such, it is important to discuss implications from the findings.

#### *Implications of the Study*

The needs of this group of new teachers as well as their initial recommendations for effective preservice teacher training have implications relating to four major groups of people: (a) preservice teachers, (b) new teachers, (c) teacher training institutions, and (d) school boards. These implications may also serve to guide future research on determining effective practice of training for teachers.

#### *Implications for Preservice Teachers*

The first implication applies to preservice teachers. The participants in this study indicated the knowledge and experiences that they believe new teachers need in inclusive classrooms. Their methods assignments should include adaptations and alternative assessments that help to promote student success. With the knowledge of the experiences new teachers need, preservice teachers may be able to better prepare themselves for their first teaching experiences. Gaining experience working with children through volunteer or paid work experience before or

during their teaching training program will help to prepare them for teaching diverse students. Specifically, gaining experiences working with children with a range of abilities, including children with special needs will build their confidence in interacting and meeting the needs of learners in inclusive classrooms. During practicums, preservice teachers should try and shadow or engage in dialogue with support staff and paraprofessionals about their roles in supporting the needs of students. Talking with a range of teachers about their experiences will also help to ease the shock of the realities of inclusion (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004). By gaining this knowledge and experience, preservice teachers will be better prepared for their first years of teaching.

#### *Implications for New Teachers*

After completing their teacher training, new teachers should be willing to learn from others with experience, such as colleagues, parents, and students. If a mentorship program is not available in their district, new teachers should network to find someone they can rely on for advice and assistance. New teachers should collaborate with support staff and members of students' IEP teams to find the most effective ways to meet their students' needs. New teachers should be open to collaborating with parents about their child's needs. New teachers need to be willing to collaborate with their students to determine strategies that will help the students be successful (Cook-Sather, 2003).

#### *Implications for Teacher Training Institutions*

Teacher training institutions have a responsibility to prepare preservice teachers with knowledge and experiences that will prepare them for their careers as teachers. The new teachers in this study voiced strong concerns about the knowledge and experiences they wish they had before they entered their inclusive classrooms. Teacher training institutions need to address the needs of new teachers to better prepare their preservice teachers (Brownell et al., 2005).

Including the knowledge new teachers need in already existing coursework is a practical way to ensure preservice teachers are fully prepared for their first classrooms. Adjusting practicum lengths and times throughout the year will allow preservice teachers to observe a more realistic picture of what their own experiences may involve. Inviting practicing teachers, support staff, and paraprofessionals to speak to preservice teachers will also provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to learn from others' experiences.

#### *Implications for School Boards*

School boards and the Ministry of Education need to be aware of the challenges new teachers face in their inclusive classrooms. Participants felt they were not meeting the needs of all of the students in their classrooms; this does not correspond to the BC Ministry of Education's goal of education and indicates that teachers are not able to fulfill their role as a teacher as stated by the BC School Act. Decreasing class size and limiting the number of students with special needs in classrooms may increase the chances of new teachers being able to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms.

School boards also need to consider implementing a mentorship program through which new teachers can be matched with an experienced teacher in a similar position. Mentorships provide invaluable learning experiences for new teachers during their first years (Whitaker, 2003). Providing this pair with release time from their classrooms to meet throughout the year will increase the likelihood of consistent meetings to discuss concerns as well as ensuring the program is not taxing on either the mentor or the new teacher.

It is interesting to note that for these seven teachers, political and Ministry initiatives were not discussed. The researcher noted the absence of discussion on current political initiatives such as Bill 33 and Ministry guidelines such as Professional Development, School-Based Teams,

and IEPs. These topics guide the delivery of service in special education and the author was surprised to note their absence in the new teachers' reflections of their experiences. While these topics were not included in the participants' discussions, they may be important for other new teachers and therefore should be investigated in future research.

#### *Directions for Further Research*

There are several directions for further research that emerge from this study. First, with a larger scale study employing a mixed method approach, results could be generalized to the larger body of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Using the findings of the current study to inform a survey that a larger sample of new teachers could complete would provide stronger results to support the recommendations provided by this study. Variables such as grade level, number of students with special needs, severity of students' needs, and amount of classroom support should all be considered. Along with surveys, interviews with teachers as well as administrators, parents, and students could provide a more comprehensive account of the needs of new teachers to meet the diverse range of needs in an inclusive classroom.

A second direction for future research would be a longitudinal study that could follow new teachers throughout their first years of teaching. This longitudinal study could track the developmental (Benner & Judge, 2000) and epistemological (Anderson et al., 1995) changes the new teachers move through in their years of teaching to inform how different stages of the continuums affect teacher experiences and recommendations for training. It would be beneficial to determine the factors that affect teachers' movement along these continuums.

Future research should also investigate how the experiences of both new and experienced teachers change as a result of Bill 33. With limits on the number of students with designations in

inclusive classrooms, are teachers better able to meet the needs of the range of learners in their classrooms?

Due to the findings that these new teachers were not able to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms, especially the higher achieving students, future research should investigate ways to include increased opportunities for gifted and higher achieving students in inclusive classrooms. This research should include student input, parent input, and teacher perspectives.

Participants in this study shared how they collaborated with IEP team members to inform student instruction and assessment; however, none of the participants mentioned using the IEP document as a guide to monitor change, or to inform instruction and assessment on an ongoing basis. Further research should investigate how IEPs are currently being used to inform students' educational programs. Research should also examine how IEPs can be used more effectively to inform instruction and assessment of students' educational programs. It would be beneficial for related research to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding implementing adapted versus modified programs based on IEP recommendations and their comfort level in adapting and modifying curriculum based on individual students' needs. Future research should also investigate effective ways to adapt programs for grey area students.

It would be important for future research to situate new teachers' experiences in the current political initiatives that shape the delivery of service in special education. Specifically, research should investigate the effects of such initiatives on teachers' practice in inclusive classrooms.

Based on the recommendations outlined in this study, future research should investigate the effect of both increased knowledge and experiences in teacher training on the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. Related research could compare the experiences of new

teachers involved in a mentoring program with those teachers who are not in a mentoring program.

New teachers and students in inclusive classrooms will benefit by having these directions for future research investigated in further detail.

### *Final Summary*

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms. With little available research in this area, this study begins to shed light on the issues and challenges new teachers face in their experiences in inclusive classrooms and provides initial recommendations that can help new teachers to meet the needs of the diverse learners in today's classrooms.

This study uncovers the successes and challenges a group of new teachers faced in their inclusive classrooms. Participants described the diversity of students present in their classrooms. They explained how they spent a disproportionate amount of time with their struggling learners and this resulted in not always meeting the needs of the higher achieving students. Participants also described those students in the grey area; students who were struggling but did not meet criteria for designation. Due to the diversity in their classrooms, the new teachers shared how they collaborated with colleagues, parents, and students to find effective ways to meet students' needs. With such diverse abilities and needs in their classrooms, participants engaged in an alternative curriculum which included attention to social and behavioural considerations. This often overshadowed the prescribed academic curriculum. Participants described the adaptations they made to the curriculum to promote student success. The new teachers gave individualized instruction and gave alternative assessments based on the needs of their students. Participants

also expressed frustrations at the time and knowledge needed to adapt the curriculum with such a range of abilities in their classrooms.

This study also provided initial recommendations on how to prepare our new teachers for the realities of inclusive classrooms. Participants expressed the need for increased factual knowledge and experiences prior to entering their first teaching positions. A mentorship program for new teachers was also recommended. The initial recommendations have implications for teacher training institutions, school boards, preservice teachers, and new teachers that should continue to be investigated.

This study provided areas for further research to continue to investigate what constitutes best practice of training for preservice teachers and how our new teachers may best be supported in their initial experiences teaching in inclusive classrooms.

Teaching in inclusive classrooms is a rewarding and challenging experience. Continued research is needed to ensure preservice teachers are given the knowledge and experiences that will best prepare them for the diversity that exists in today's inclusive classrooms.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Certificate



University of Victoria

Human Research Ethics Board  
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**Human Research Ethics Board  
 Certificate of Approval**

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Jessie Loraas-Pietsch Graduate Student	<u>Department/School</u> EPLS	<u>Supervisor</u> Dr. Jillian Roberts	
<u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>			
<u>Project Title:</u> Experiences of New Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms			
<u>Protocol No.</u> 05-307	<u>Approval Date</u> 15-Nov-05	<u>Start Date</u> 15-Nov-05	<u>End Date</u> 14-Nov-06

**Certification**

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

Dr. Richard Keeler  
 Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions or minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of a "Research Status" form.

05-307 Loraas-Pietsch, Jessie

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

# Are you a new teacher working in an inclusive classroom?

**For my Masters' thesis, I am looking to explore the experiences of new teachers in inclusive public school classrooms in BC. If you are currently working in an inclusive classroom or have in the past year, I invite you to share your experiences with me.**

Please call Jessie for more information at 595-0470, or

**[jessielo@uvic.ca](mailto:jessielo@uvic.ca)**

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

**Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies  
University of Victoria**

***Participant Consent Form***

Experiences of New Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms” which is a thesis being conducted by Jessie Loraas-Pletsch, a Master’s student at the University of Victoria in the department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies. The study is being supervised by Dr. Jillian Roberts, a professor in the department. Dr. Roberts may be reached at 721-7817, Jessie Loraas-Pletsch may be reached at 595-0470. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to understand the essence of experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms in British Columbia, as well as to lay a foundation of knowledge about best practice of special education training for preservice teachers at teacher training institutions. This study is not an evaluation of the post-secondary institution where you received your teacher training.

**What is involved:**

There will be two tape-recorded interviews during this study; interviews will each last approximately one hour. ONGOING SIGNED CONSENT WILL BE REQUIRED AT EACH INTERVIEW SESSION. Interviews will focus on your experiences working in an inclusive classroom. The interviews will be conducted at a location of your choosing. INTERVIEWS WILL BE TRANSCRIBED BY THE RESEARCHER AFTER EACH INTERVIEW. TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS WILL BE KEPT WITHOUT ANY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ATTACHED.

What kind of risks and costs are involved:

Participating in this study will not cost you anything but your time. I am not aware of any psychological risks of participating in this study. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. You are free not to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

**What are the benefits involved:**

The expected benefits associated with your participation in this study are the knowledge gained about the essence of experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms as well as helping to

lay a foundation of knowledge that may serve to inform special education training for future preservice teachers.

**Voluntary participation:**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will be able to withdraw at any time without consequences or explanation. If you do withdraw, your data will only be used with your consent.

**Anonymity and confidentiality:**

All identifying information will not be attached to the data; a confidential pseudonym ID number will replace your name. Names will not be used anywhere in the study. All data will be kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to. Transcripts of interviews will be kept without identifying information attached and audio tapes will be destroyed (burned) after the interview has been transcribed. All transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed (shredded) after 5 years time.

**Dissemination of results:**

It is expected that the results of this study will be shared with others through a Master's thesis and potentially in a publication for an educational journal, or presentations at scholarly and community based meetings. No identifying information will be shared; pseudonyms will be used. If the researcher wishes to use the data from this study for a future project, she will seek written permission from each participant in order to reuse his or her data.

**Contacts:**

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and her supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria at 250-472-4545 or ovprhe@uvic.ca.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study. Please sign this form with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**A copy of this consent form will be given to you, and a copy will be kept by the researcher.**

Jessie Loraas-Pletsch  
Graduate Student  
Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies  
University of Victoria

(250) 595-0470  
jessielo@uvic.ca

## Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guides

*First Interview*

I am interested in learning about experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms and I invite you to share with me your own experiences as a new teacher in an inclusive classroom. The questions I will ask you will focus on your experiences working within an inclusive classroom. When answering these questions, I would like you to specifically think about your experiences in relation to inclusion and special education. It is hoped that by examining the experiences of new teachers in inclusive classrooms that we will be able to raise an awareness of the best practice of special education training for preservice teachers. The first set of questions are designed to provide some basic background information. If any of the questions I ask do not make sense, please let me know and I will clarify the question.

*Background Questions:*

What is your current position? (number of students with special needs, school demographics)

Where did you receive your teacher education training?

What special education training have you received in teacher training/professional development?

What related experiences did you have prior to your teacher training?

What do you believe is the goal of education (in relation to inclusion)?

What do you believe is the role of a teacher in an inclusive classroom?

*Interview Questions:*

Tell me what it is like for you during a typical day at your school in relation to inclusion.

How do you feel about the service/instruction/assessment you are providing students with special needs/students without special needs in your class? Can you talk a little about successes and challenges you have experienced with respect to inclusion practice in your classroom?

Is there anything else you can share that is pertinent to your experience in your inclusive classroom?

*Recommendations:*

Describe your experiences in teacher education as preparation for working in an inclusive classroom? What do you think would have enhanced your experiences in teacher education as preparation for the inclusive classroom?

Are there any training/experiences that you wish you had before you entered your inclusive classroom?

*Second Interview*

Thank you for confirming your transcript. I have a few additional questions that will serve to provide a deeper understanding of your experience in your inclusive classroom.

*Background Questions:*

1) Which statement best describes you?

In my teaching I:

- (a) am learning about important concepts in my teaching, challenging major assumptions about teaching, and learning about new ideas.
- (b) am developing effective classroom management techniques, am confident in my decisions, and adding to my increasing repertoire of teaching techniques.
- (c) am making adaptations to known teaching techniques that are dependent upon the characteristics of individual students, and creating individual goals for students based on ability levels.

2) Which statement best describes you?

I believe that:

- (a) there is one right answer for every problem or question.
- (b) Every teaching situation is unique and all solutions or approaches to a problem are equally valid.
- (c) Even though there may not be one right answer, there is a set of criteria for making judgements about possible solutions to problems.

*Interview Questions:*

3) Can you think of any more relevant experiences to your inclusive classroom?

4) Any other successes or challenges?

5) Has anything changed since I last talked to you in your inclusive classroom?

*Recommendations:*

6) Are there any more recommendations you can offer to preservice teachers, school districts, and/or teacher training institutions?

Thank you and I will be sending you a copy of the final categories, clusters, and themes to ensure they accurately reflect your experiences in your inclusive classroom.

Appendix E: Analysis Confirmation Email to Participants

Date

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope you have been enjoying the sunshine!

Attached you will find the transcribed interview. So far, the transcribed interview has been initially analyzed to identify themes. Please notice that your name has been removed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

At this point in the study, I would be grateful if you could:

- 1) Read over the attached transcribed interview to ensure accuracy
- 2) Read the italicized and highlighted initial themes to ensure they represent your intentions.

After you have read through the transcript, please email me with your phone number and a good time to contact you so I can follow-up on our interview and any other comments you may have. Thank you so much for your time and energy in my study.

Please call me at 595-0470 or email me if you have any questions.

Thanks so much,

Jessie Loraas-Pletsch  
Researcher

Attachment